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## 72 – Women in General Practice

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Recently the participation of women has increased in work outside their homes. In the practice of Medicine, it was not different, especially in "General Practice".

Brazil has about 430,000 doctors, with a predominance of men (57.5%). However, since 2009, the number of women entering the Medicine courses overcame men, according to the Brazilian Regional Councils. Thus, according to the survey "Medical Democracy in Brazil in 2015" (1), in the group of students finishing graduate school, they are a majority (56.2%). There is also a female predominance among medical professionals in the public sphere (52.7% women), as in the basic medical specialties.

Men and women are equal in dignity; however, in addition to the obvious physical and hormonal differences, there are also many different psychological characteristics between them. Certain features, which occur mostly in women, may contribute to the choice of medical profession and specialty.

Woman, commonly, is able to handle many situations at the same time. Therefore, she cares for her immediate family (husband, children), maintains contact with the "big family" (other family members), manages the house (supplies, cleaning, meals - supervising who performs these tasks or taking on these charges) in addition to exercising the profession (professional and update activities / continuing academic education). "All at once".

In many families woman spends more time with small children than man, deals directly with children education, accompany them to various activities outside the home, manages family recreation, worries about all family health problems in a very special way, etc.

Many times, precisely this female ability to handle various situations at the same time can promote the exercise of general practice ("to manage simultaneously multiple complaints and pathologies, both acute and chronic health problems in the individual") (2).

In addition, "to quality care it is necessary to develop skills that will help the doctor to know not only the disease but also to understand the human being who is sick. Among these skills, empathy has proved to be a fundamental element" (3). Empathy is a "personal quality necessary for the understanding of the inner experiences and feelings of patients" (4). Women nature is also conducive to solidarity and empathy.

Besides, women face many uniquely female experiences, such as PMS, pregnancy, childbirth, breastfeeding and menopause changes, and other situations frequent to their female patients, as taking care of small children or of elderly relatives, work overload etc. We agree with some authors who say there is a close relationship

between life experiences and the development of empathy. Thus, a female doctor can better understand, for example, an anxiety about any of these situations, as an identification process.

Attitudes of any physician should have some characteristics of "maternal activity: inquire carefully the patient, listen to him patiently and help" (5). Both women and male patients realize when they are cared with love, devotion, and the feeling of exclusivity at the time of medical attendance.

Some studies have confirmed our experience that the time spent on calls made by female doctors is often higher than spent by male doctors. Other studies have shown a greater persuasiveness of them, leading patients to adopt changes in lifestyle more often. We also realize a greater inclination to explain the disease, rather than the procedures or prescriptions. Many patients come to us simply because they want to "understand" or "confirm" what other professionals informed them tersely, or prescribed without proper "justifications". Even most educated patients, or "Internet researchers", want to supplement their information about diseases and treatments.

However, there are some disadvantages in this association of mainly female characteristics with medical practice. The sum of so many activities and so much zeal can promote stress, "burnout syndrome", difficulties to take care of their own health (proper nutrition, restorative sleep, regular physical activity), although they spend their lives caring for others health. These "side effects" of general practice are not exclusive of women; there was a survey where women doctors answered questions about their own activities by assigning a work overload in 35% of cases, while only 30% of men answered the same.

Moreover, medical practice-related studies in the USA showed a higher rate of divorce in medical women, particularly in those working more than 40 hours/week. There is a higher suicide rate among female physicians comparing to male doctors; the suicide rate is 4 times higher in female physicians comparing to over 25 years women (5).

Some measures are necessary to minimize these issues. Currently several organizations - including WONCA - have had some initiatives to improve health, quality of life and participation of women in professional events (6). They have encouraged the participation of women in organizing teams and giving conferences. They are looking forward to give women chances and voice. In addition, respect for women's dignity during their events have increased.

We highlight, for its practicality, something suggested by WONCA and already in practice by SOBRAMFA in Brazil: the annual meetings have taken place in locations with adequate infrastructure to the presence of the families of medical participants, especially babies and small children.

Considering the peculiarities of the female presence in Medicine, we conclude that it is possible to a woman to be a doctor - specifically a "general practitioner" - and at the same time, exercise the role of wife, mother, home administrator, daughter, citizen ... We can do it. It is gratifying and worthwhile!

### ***Take Home Message***

- Women have some peculiarities in exercising medical profession, and often have more attention and empathy during medical activities.
- . It is necessary to minimize the work overload caused by the accumulation of activities women have, being a general practitioner and also wife, mother, daughter, housekeeper, etc.
- . Women should care about their own physical and emotional health as well as they do in respect of their patients.

### ***Original Abstract***

<http://www.woncaeurope.org/content/abstract-no-1153-workshop-women-general-practice-workshop>

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