



PGWMA — Officers of the recently formed Prince George's Women Physicians' Association pose together. From the left are Dr. Jill Karatinos, secretary; Dr. Faranak F. Sotoudeh, president; Dr. Marta M. Mondino, vice president; and Dr. Christine Delima, treasurer.

Photo By Rachel Cope Goldfarb

Market Place in Bowie.

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DOCTORS IN DISTRESS

Women physicians form own medical society

By RACHEL COPE GOLDFARB
Staff Writer

In a move some members call "courageous" and "gutsy," women physicians in Prince George's County have banded together in an effort to meet some of their own special needs.

The newly formed Prince George's Women's Medical Association (PGWMA) was born of the isolation members have experienced in a primarily male profession.

"I was isolated," said Dr. Marta M. Mondino, chief of anesthesiology at Leland Memorial Hospital. "I was in a male dominated profession, particularly older males."

Dr. Christine Delima, a cardiologist, said each

one of the women had separately "wondered if it was just us, feeling that way. Now we know it is not."

The group began to meet formally after a colleague had cancer surgery and needed emotional and financial support. While working together to help her, the women discovered problems they had in common.

"We discovered subtle needs," said Dr. Jill Karatinos, a Crofton resident whose general family practice is in Bowie. "We would begin a sentence and the others would understand. We feel isolated from our male counterparts because we don't have all the same needs."

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Bowie Blade newspaper, late 1980s.

...Doctors in distress

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Dr. Faranak F. Sotoudeh, a Greenbelt endocrinologist, said women doctors share social problems. "We don't have much in common with the men (physicians).

Dr. Mondino told of another common problem among her colleagues. "It's hard on the kids. I worked at Suburban (hospital) last Monday through Tuesday for 24 hours. When I got home, I had to give all my energy to the kids. They don't have to pay for that."

She said she still finds time to attend committee meetings at her children's school and clubs.

Dr. Setoudah added, "Kids want their mother home because the kid next door has his home with him."

She said, "You have to be a little compulsive to be in this business. We go home to cook, clean, and mow the lawn. It's very important to me for us to get together for a meal. It's the only time we have a sense of family."

But the doctors return to their problems with their male counterparts.

Dr. Karatinos says, "You have to be one step ahead of the male doctors in order to compete."

She continued, "The generation before me, and even some of mine, was brainwashed to feel you had to depend on males. Because they (patients) don't feel competent, they believe you can't be competent."

"Within the hospital we are always outnumbered. On committees our ideas are ignored," said Dr. Mondino, "and then another (male) member brings it up a half-hour later, it is voted on and passed."

The women said references to them as "honey, baby, sweetheart, and girls" by their male colleagues are common, subtle indications of a lack of respect.

"Their prejudice is so culturally ingrained that the men don't recognize it as such," said Dr. Karatinos.

"We are thought of as woman, mother, wife, and then physician, in that order," related Dr. Mondino.

Several of the doctors cited a common male rejoinder to accusations of sexual bias. "I don't have anything against women," they recalled hearing on many occasions, "After all, I married one."

Dr. Karatinos asserts, "All we want is respect and credibility in the workplace."

All agreed that because of the difficulty and competitive nature of their training and professional responsibilities, women physicians often view one another as rivals.

They say their lives are further complicated by the need to "leave titles outside the door" when they go home. Dr. Mondino has asked neighbors not to call her "Doctor" and Dr. Delima said she uses her husband's last name with "Mrs." before it for all non-professional purposes.

Dr. Karatinos recalls that she married her husband long before she went to medical school.

She said, with a chuckle, that if he had met her as a practicing physician, "I don't think he'd have married me!"

Members emphasize that PGWMA is a free-standing organization, not part of the Prince George's County Medical Society. The majority of their fast-growing roster, now approaching 40 members, also belong to the county unit.

"We feel we have a voice as an entity. We now have a franchise within the larger county medical society," Dr. Karatinos explained.

The executive director of the Prince George's County Medical Society, Angelo Troisi, said, "All our members are individuals. We are the most democratic organization you'll ever run into."

Troisi added, "There is absolutely no antagonism between the physicians here. Many physicians are in groups like these," citing as examples groups of doctors who have joined by nationality for support.

"We applaud the efforts of any group or individuals to improve the quality of patient care."

Troisi claims "The county medical society is addressing concerns of women physicians. The times are changing and the medical society is changing along with them."

He said courses are being offered by the society to women physicians in financial planning and insurance matters.

One-third of all students in medical schools are women, says Troisi. "We are getting more and more females — thank God. It's a wonderful trend."

A 1983 American Medical Association reveals, however, that the average male physician works 52 hours per week, while the average female physician works 54 hours per week and does not earn as much for those efforts.

The PGWMA states distinct goals including the establishment of interpersonal support, enhancement of self-worth, improvement of rapport between nurses and physicians, improvement of communication between male/female physicians.

The group intends to increase female representation on medical society committees, improve understanding of third party payers with regard to special health problems of women, and to act as a forum for cases of discrimination against women physicians in the workplace.

Association members pride themselves on patient advocacy. They speak of "little details" in patient care like transportation for the elderly, family relationships during illness, and general comforts such as clean sheets, being vital in the care of their patients.

Dr. Mondino said her favorite letter from a patient came in response to a small favor. As she passed in the surgical recovery room, Dr. Mondino covered the woman's bare feet with a blanket because she knew how uncomfortable cold feet could make a patient feel.

The patient wrote that she would never forget it. The doctor says she will not forget, either.