

LEADERSHIP PAGE



Fostering New Leaders and Advancing Diversity and Inclusion Are Key to Achieving ACC Vision



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Changing culture does not happen overnight. It requires a dedicated vision, detailed strategy, long-term commitment, and a willingness and nimbleness to adjust course if needed. Also critical is a pipeline of leaders who not only understand the vision and strategy, but are also prepared to celebrate small victories, learn from short-term setbacks, and lead with the long game in mind.

Earlier this year, the American College of Cardiology embarked on a long-term, culture-changing journey to improve diversity and inclusion in the cardiovascular workforce and the College's membership and leadership (1). No easy feat, a team of dedicated College leaders worked together to develop a vision that, in part, calls on the American College of Cardiology (ACC) to "harness the power of the diversity of its members to advance patient care, spur innovation, and improve health equity among individual patients and populations" (1).

A comprehensive strategic plan was also put into place focused on the following 3 primary objectives: 1) enhance the culture within the cardiology profession and the perceptions of the field to be inclusive, professional, equitable, and welcoming; 2) realize and sustain the value of diversity over the long term by implementing structures and continuous improvement programs within the ACC to ensure accountable execution; and 3) engage and leverage all available talent by attracting and providing value to underrepresented groups in cardiology across the career

lifespan, from ensuring a deep pipeline to recruitment, retention, and leadership development (1).

Although it will be years before the fruits of labor are realized, there are early signs that the College and cardiovascular profession are on the right path. A comprehensive communication plan focused primarily on raising awareness of diversity and inclusion has been a fundamental element of the first phase of the ACC's Diversity and Inclusion Initiative. #TheFaceOfCardiology social media campaign has taken off as a means of highlighting the diverse group of men and women who currently make up the profession, as well as those coming up through the ranks, on Facebook and Twitter. The College has also leveraged its print and digital communications to raise awareness and facilitate discussion around some of the challenges to diversity and inclusion, including sexual harassment, wage disparities, and work/life balance, and the connection between a diverse and inclusive workforce and patient outcomes. These efforts were recently recognized with a Gold 2018 MarCom Award from the Association of Marketing and Communications Professionals.

ACC leaders have also played an instrumental role in examining the importance of diversity and inclusion across the profession, whether through published papers in leading cardiovascular journals like *JACC*, major media outlets, or speaking engagements and workshops at live meetings like ACC's Annual Scientific Session or International Conferences. A

recent Leadership Page in the *Journal* highlighted the many ways that the ACC's Board of Governors and State Chapters are out in front of this issue and engaging cardiovascular professionals in local and regional diversity and inclusion efforts, including leadership training, committee appointments, chapter reports, and recruitment of the next generation of the cardiovascular workforce (2). The ACC's Board of Trustees is also ensuring diversity and inclusion is included in every committee's work plan and requiring annual updates on progress. Development of diversity and inclusion competencies is also underway, as well as strengthening ACC's understanding of member demographics to guide future appointments.

These efforts aren't going unnoticed. Attend any major cardiovascular meeting this past year and you'll see more women and underrepresented groups in cardiology moderating scientific sessions and press conferences, leading workshops, and participating in panel discussions. At the ACC level, the College's Board of Trustees will welcome 2 new women in March 2019—Athena Poppas, MD, FACC (vice president), and Claire Duvernoy, MD, FACC (trustee). Plans for ACC.19 in New Orleans, while still being finalized, include a Diversity and Inclusion Town Hall, dedicated sessions in the ACC Member Lounges and the Heart-to-Heart Stage, increased opportunities for mentoring and networking, the launch of ACC's "Young Scholars Program" aimed at attracting high school and college students to the cardiology profession, and the inaugural "Distinguished Award for Leadership in Diversity and Inclusion" to be given at Convocation.

Looking ahead, the ACC will move beyond awareness-building to concrete actions. Look for the rollout of tools and resources, as well as local and regional programs, to attract high school- and college-aged underrepresented minorities and women to careers in medicine and cardiology. Expect more events in concert with ACC's Women in Cardiology Section like the one that debuted at ACC's International Middle East Conference in October 2018. Women attendees were able to take part in a speed mentoring session on topics such as careers in interventional cardiology, how to develop a women's heart program/center, how to achieve work-life balance, and the value of cardiovascular research in the Gulf Region. ACC state and international chapter outreach and leadership development efforts will continue to expand, as will the pipeline of new research addressing barriers to diversity and inclusion in the cardiovascular workforce.

Fostering new leaders within all levels of the workforce is also a vitally important factor to long-term success—a factor the College is prepared to invest in to achieve its vision for diversity and inclusion, as well as its overarching vision of a world where innovation and knowledge optimize care and outcomes. As a key part of the College's next Strategic Plan, member leadership development programming is being designed with the goal of creating a pipeline of leaders diverse in thought, experience, and career stage, to contribute to ACC activities and the workforce at all levels of patient care and cardiovascular leadership across the globe.

Activities will leverage existing *Leadership Academy* programming, expand programs to target members in ACC's robust member sections and chapter structure, and take advantage of new technologies and even collaborative partnerships to increase leadership opportunities for a much broader group of emerging leaders. The Women in Cardiology Section is already planning to leverage its established state and international groups to expand its popular leadership meetings in 2019. Additionally, ACC's Diversity and Inclusion Task Force will be implementing activities to expose and encourage women to consider clinical research careers, including an industry-funded cardiovascular investigators Boot Camp. The College will also be collaborating with cardiovascular specialty societies to provide leadership development opportunities and training for women and underrepresented minorities. Add these activities to the already existing leadership development opportunities, and it is clear that the College is committed to helping its members further develop existing skills and leverage their considerable talents for the benefit of the profession and the patients we serve.

As mentioned earlier, this is not a short journey, but the College is committed for its duration. To quote former ACC President John Gordon Harold, MD, MACC: "The ACC was founded in part to be the professional home for those not welcome elsewhere—recognizing that an inclusive cardiovascular workforce best guarantees achieving the mission of transforming cardiovascular care and improving heart health" (3).

To paraphrase a quote often attributed to Gandhi, be the change that you wish to see in the world (4). How will we know success? Success is when we can look at the incoming class of new cardiology fellows and the sea of faces are representative of the patients we see every day; when the number of women in leadership positions is so commonplace we have stopped counting; when anyone who wants to

embark on a cardiovascular career is welcomed and encouraged to do so; and when diversity and inclusion is woven so tightly into our fabric that we no longer need an initiative to draw attention—it is who we are.

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