

## **Appendix 2B: Questions and Answers About the Women Liaison Officers**

### ***How many WLOs are there?***

Each medical school, member hospital and member society may appoint one or two WLOs. Presently 225 WLOs are liaisons from 122 U.S. medical schools and 22 from the 16 Canadian schools. They are a diverse group in terms of title, from dean's assistant to division head.

Now that over one-third of house officers are women, many CEOs of AAMC's Council of Teaching Hospitals and Health Systems (COTH) have appointed a WLO. Presently, 385 CEOs have appointed 224 COTH WLOs. These WLOs also represent a broad range of titles, from staff coordinator to vice president. In some cases, hospital CEOs have appointed someone who is already serving as a dean-appointed WLO; however, because it will increase the number of persons receiving AAMC publications, a better strategy is to select a different woman leader within the hospital.

Currently, 24 Council of Academic Societies (CAS) members have a WLO.

### ***How are WLOs appointed?***

Each September AAMC sends to all medical school deans and COTH CEOs a computer-generated form listing the WLO(s) currently representing the institution. Deans and CEOs are asked to make any deletions, additions or corrections. At *any* time of the year, however, they (as well as CAS officers) may appoint a WLO by writing a letter to the AAMC's Director for Women's Programs.

While there are no selection guidelines *per se*, women who are appointed as WLOs should be well-connected within their institutions and have a demonstrated interest in improving the environment for women students, faculty or administrators. When two are appointed, a balance is desirable such that, for instance, if the first WLO works primarily with students, the second one should be close to faculty issues. One problem that sometimes develops is for an inactive WLO to retain the appointment when others more committed and energetic stand ready to fill the position. In such cases, it seems advisable for the more active person to be appointed the WLO.

### ***What are the responsibilities and benefits of serving as WLO?***

WLOs are invited to participate in the AAMC Annual Meeting and to attend the WLO Caucus at this meeting. This meeting is an irreplaceable source of energy, information and networking. A brochure is mailed to WLOs each summer with a more detailed overview of the WIM sessions than that contained in the AAMC preliminary program, which is also mailed in July. The meeting dates for upcoming years are: November 1 - November 5, 1997 in Washington, DC and October 31-November 3, 1998 in New Orleans.

At her institution, the primary responsibility of the WLO is to read and make available to others information channeled from AAMC. Regular mailings include four issues per year of *Women in Medicine Update*, announcements of WIM Professional Development Seminars, *WIM Statistics*, and the *WLO Directory*. WLOs also receive the monthly *AAMC Reporter*, *AAMC STAT* and the *Washington*

*Highlights.* Among other resources available are WLO mailing labels for publicizing important position openings, assistance in locating speakers for a variety of WIM programs, and information on other AAMC services and databases, such as the Faculty Roster System and the Medical Student Graduation Questionnaire results.

If feasible, it is desirable for WLOs to assume responsibility to:

- help provide continuity to women student and/or faculty groups and initiate programs targeted at their professional development;
- promote recruitment of women faculty and administrators; maintain communication with the institution's affirmative action officer; and help identify appropriate candidates and sources of candidates;
- respond to media requests and inquiries in conjunction with the public affairs office;
- serve as liaison with other professional women's groups and as a speaker on gender-related issues;
- represent the institution on local, state and national committees addressing women's concerns.

Because there is no set "job description," each WLO is encouraged to write her own and to negotiate with the dean/CEO for resources. Given the increasingly stark fiscal realities in academic medicine, WLOs are well-advised to negotiate in terms of activities that will support the *institutional mission*. For instance, medical centers are recognizing that many faculty need professional skill development opportunities that medical centers have not made available. If the WLO and/or women faculty organization decided that this was an important initiative to pursue, the workshops planned could be open to men as well as women while still targeting those skills areas, e.g., negotiating and conflict resolution, that women frequently identify as deficits.

A WLO position description might include the following: a) fiscal support to attend the AAMC Annual Meeting and to initiate/sustain the most central WIM activities at the institution; b) secretarial assistance with mailings and meetings; and c) inclusion of information about the WLO position in publications such as the faculty handbook.

The use each WLO makes of the position will be greatly influenced by:

- the amount of time she can spare for this activity;
- the stage of maturity of the medical school or hospital's WIM program, e.g., new initiative or long-established women faculty organization;
- the existence of other active local groups and leaders on campus, e.g., AMWA, university ombudsperson, chancellor's advisory committee on women;
- the extent to which other faculty, students and staff at the institution are working and volunteering with her;
- whether the dean or CEO appreciates the importance of efforts to increase women's leadership and provides vocal and financial support.

### **Who guides program planning for the WLOs?**

There is an eight-member Coordinating Committee that plans the AAMC WIM Annual Meeting program, initiates projects, and guides programs. The Committee is comprised of:

- six WLOs who are presently active at their institution (efforts are made to achieve diversity in terms of geographic region and title, e.g., student affairs dean, professor);
- one academic department chair;

- one medical student (selected by AAMC's Organization of Student Representatives' Administrative Board from a pool of applicants for the position).

**Does AAMC award achievement in contributions to WIM programs?**

The AAMC Women in Medicine Leadership Award, established in 1993, recognizes individuals for outstanding contributions to developing women leaders in academic medicine. Included with the award are one free tuition to AAMC's WIM Junior or Senior Professional Development Seminar and an engraved plaque which is presented at the WLO Caucus at AAMC's annual meeting. Any member of the academic medical community may be nominated. The award is intended for those who demonstrate evidence of substantial, innovative and far-reaching institutional and/or national contributions to: improve the educational and professional environment for women in academic medicine; enhance the development of women faculty into positions of greater leadership, and/or; nurture students in their academic career development. Previous recipients are:

- 1993: Leah Dickstein, M.D., Associate Dean for Faculty and Student Advocacy, *University of Louisville College of Medicine*
- 1994: Sharon Hostler, M.D., McLemore Birdsong Professor of Pediatrics, *University of Virginia Health Sciences Center* (for institutional leadership) and Nancy Gary, M.D., Dean, *Uniformed Services University for the Health Sciences* (for national leadership)
- 1995: May Cohen, M.D., Associate Dean, Health Services, *McMaster University School of Medicine* (for national leadership) and the *University of Southern California's* Medical Faculty Women's Association