



Women's Health Research Institute
Putting Women First

June 2014

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Dear Friend,

Our [April 2014 Newsletter](#) highlighted the significance of sex-based research in basic and clinical science. While the Women's Health Research Institute, along with its Leadership Council, has long advocated for the inclusion of female animals and cells in basic research, there was never an officially mandated shift in basic research design--until now. On May 14, the NIH unveiled [new policies](#) that demand sex consideration in preclinical research funded by the NIH. Indeed, this is a triumph for sex-based research advocates!

This announcement has spurred a surge of media attention on sex-based research. Indeed, research conducted at the pre-clinical phase directly impacts human trials in providing equal attention to both men and women's health needs. The Women's Health Research Institute is delighted that Northwestern University has specialty clinics that tailor care to women individually, taking sex into account. This month's issue will highlight these specialty clinics that bring personalized medicine with sex as a consideration.

Sincerely,

The Institute Staff

The Women's Health Research Institute's Mission



WOMEN'S HEALTH
RESEARCH INSTITUTE
NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY
Science to Care

The mission of the Women's Health Research Institute is to accelerate the rate of discovery in the sciences that impact women's health and well-being and to increase the research and education portfolio in women's health at Northwestern University and its clinical affiliates. The institute is achieving this by:

- Fostering research that explores the sex and gender determinants of health and disease with an emphasis on women
- Encouraging interdisciplinary research, diversity inclusiveness and a comprehensive approach to research
- Preparing researchers and clinicians who understand the sex and gender determinants of health and disease
- Nurturing the science and medicine pipeline for women and girls interested in science
- Facilitating the transition of basic research into clinical practice that is sex and gender sensitive
- Becoming the authoritative resource for the community on women's health issues and providing opportunities to engage women in advancing research that includes sex and gender variables

The Women's Health Research Institute has been one of the forces behind the recent media attention on sex differences in research, serving as a collaborator on a ["60 Minutes" segment on sex-inclusion](#), which was later discussed on an [episode of "The Colbert Report."](#) Several Northwestern clinics have partnered with the Women's Health Research Institute's mission to provide sex-based care to patients. These Northwestern clinics are helping to provide better science, better care, and better medicine to all. The following organizations have officially partnered with the Institute, and together, have identified ways to share skills and resources to enhance the programs that advance women's health.

Clinical Programs that are Focusing on Women's Care

The Asher Center for Study and Treatment of Depressive Disorders

Mental disorders are the cause of more than 37% of disabilities worldwide, with depression being the leading cause of disability among people aged 15 and older, according to the World Health Organization's *Global Burden of Disease and Risk Factors* (2006). Compared to men, women have twice the rate of depression, with a specific risk at puberty, premenstrually, postpartum, and in the perimenopause. A striking 21% (1 in 5) women and 12% of men will have at least one episode of major depressive disorder in their lifetimes.



This center specializes in reproductive related depressions in women. The new clinical program is designed to advance the following mission:

- Developing novel assessment and diagnostic strategies, as well as pharmacologic and non-drug treatments for women of childbearing age and the broader population of patients with mood disorders
- Translating our scientific advances into practice and policy through publications, training and mentorship, and service development in women's mental health and mood disorders
- Recruiting, supporting and retaining a highly skilled, diverse and multi-disciplinary professional staff that remains at the cutting edge of women's mental health and mood disorders research

The Center for Women's Cardiovascular Health



The Bluhm Cardiovascular Institute of Northwestern Memorial Hospital's Center for Women's Cardiovascular Health is founded on the principles of identifying cardiovascular disease in women of all ages and providing care that is designed specifically for women. Marla A. Mendelson, MD, the medical director of the Center, is committed to meeting the needs of women affected by cardiovascular disease through a multidisciplinary team approach. Dr. Mendelson is joined by associate medical director Vera H. Rigolin, MD.

Together these physicians are dedicated to promoting women's awareness of cardiovascular health, addressing risk factors including stress, tobacco use, nutrition, and exercise, and committed to conducting research clinical trials to advance the knowledge of cardiovascular care for women. The Center for Women's Cardiovascular Health is developing a standard of care that recognizes women as unique individuals and tailors treatment strategies to optimize their specific cardiovascular needs.

Northwestern Medicine Integrated Pelvic Health Program

One in three women will experience a pelvic floor disorder in her lifetime. In fact, urinary control problems affect millions of US women--including 60% of post-menopausal women and 30% of young women. Natural processes such as aging and childbirth may lead to increased risks for pelvic floor disorders. Northwestern's Integrated Pelvic Health Program features a unique team of specialists including urogynecologists, urologists and colorectal surgeons, who collaborate on the best treatment options for patients suffering from urinary and fecal incontinence and pelvic organ prolapse, among other complex pelvic floor disorders. Four



Northwestern Medicine physicians were among the first group of doctors nationally to achieve board certification in the subspecialty of Female Pelvic Medicine & Reconstructive Surgery. Kimberly S. Kenton, MD, Stephanie J. Kielb, MD, Lisa Labin Johnson, MD, and Christina Lewicky-Gaupp, MD, recently earned the new certification, which is jointly recognized by the American Boards of Obstetrics & Gynecology and Urology.

Before the board subspecialty was offered, doctors entered the field through certification either in urology or gynecology. The new Female Pelvic Medicine & Reconstructive Surgery recognizes the complexity and multidisciplinary skill needed to treat pelvic disorders.

The Women's Neurology Center



THE WOMEN'S
NEUROLOGY
CENTER

Often brain conditions are more difficult to treat in women than in men, due to hormones and reproductive concerns that can greatly influence a woman's neurological condition and treatment options. Research suggests:

- 20% of women suffer from migraines
- Hormones affect seizure frequency in 30% of women with epilepsy
- Women are three times more likely than men to be diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis
- Medications used to treat neurological disorders may have significant impact on pregnancy and contraception effectiveness
- Stroke mortality is higher in women, although 30% of women are unaware of their stroke factors

This center offers sub-specialty consultations in many areas of neurology with special attention to how a patient's neurological condition affects her as a woman. These neurologists are experts in the fields of migraine, sleep disorders, vertigo, stroke, multiple sclerosis and epilepsy. They also have particular experience and interest in women's health.

The Women's Skin Health Program at Northwestern



The Women's Skin Health Program provides women of all ages and stages of life with comprehensive medical and surgical dermatologic care. Patients receive medical treatment and education regarding common skin disorders such as acne and rosacea as well as surgical and cosmetic consultations. Skin concerns and diseases that occur during pregnancy are areas of specific interest and expertise.

How Can You Continue the Sex-Differences Discussion?

Advocating for Sex-Differences

Women differ from men from our skin to our brains to our hearts, and it is important to consider sex differences in the care and treatment of women. The Women's Health Research Institute, as part of Northwestern Medicine, is committed to advocating for the full spectrum of women's health needs by tailoring treatment that fits women's unique health needs. Help raise awareness for sex-based research and care by:

- Asking your doctor about sex differences in any health condition you have
- Letting your legislators know you support the new NIH policy
- Advocating for sex-specific drug labeling

We are on the precipice of a women's health movement and we need your help to continue drawing attention to these important issues!

Sources:

[Recent Advances in Pelvic Floor Disorders in Women, Kimberly Kenton, MD, MS](#)

[Women's Health Research Institute website](#)

Author:

Megan Castle, Program Coordinator, Women's Health Research Institute

RESEARCH STUDY

Breast Cancer and Depression Study

The Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at Northwestern University, in

collaboration with Northwestern Memorial Hospital Cancer Center, is conducting a clinical trial for an alternative treatment for depression (not using medication) for women who have Breast Cancer but are currently in remission. This study is for women between the ages of 22-70 and are currently diagnosed with Depression. For participation and more information, please call (312) 503-7071.

INSTITUTE HAPPENINGS

WHRI Will Host Monthly Research Forum 'Sex and Drugs: Do Medications Affect Men and Women Differently?' Featuring Dr. Steven Belknap on June 17, 2014

Join us for our monthly luncheon research discussion featuring Steven Belknap, MD and his presentation on "Sex and Drugs: Do Medications Affect Men and Women Differently?"

This event will take place on Tuesday, June 17 from 12:00-1:00pm in Prentice Women's Hospital, 250 E. Superior Street, 3rd floor conference room L. [Register for free today](#) to ensure your seat and a lunch!

The Women's Health Research Institute's High School Summer Program Set for June 23-27!

The [Women's Health Science Program](#) (WHSP) is an accomplished citywide high school STEM education program. The Summer 2014 WHSP academy will incorporate scientific themes and topics ranging from reproductive health to oncofertility to anatomy and more! This year's academy will be held June 23-27 from 8:00am-4:00pm. If you are a clinician, researcher, graduate student, or medical student who would like to volunteer to run activities, please e-mail Program Directors at whsp@northwestern.edu.

UPCOMING EVENTS

WHRI Monthly Research Forum "Sex and Drugs: Do Medications Affect Men and Women Differently?" Featuring Dr. Steven Belknap, June 17 from 12:00-1:00pm

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