Dear Friends,

Happy New Year! The Women's Health Research Institute at Northwestern University has had a busy year of programs, research forums, and publications. We enjoy providing these resources to students, faculty, staff, and community members and we would like to thank you for making 2014 such a great success!

This edition of our monthly newsletter highlights our activities of the past year. As our Institute continues to expand, we look for increased opportunities to provide better resources, information, and programs to our community, and we have exciting announcements for the upcoming year. Thank you for your patronage and we look forward to your continued involvement in 2015!

Sincerely,

The Institute Staff

The Women's Health Research Institute: A Year in Review

Since its inception the Women's Health Research Institute has been actively changing the face of women's health by:
- Increasing the number of women in clinical studies through our statewide registry
- Creating awareness on the importance of sex and gender to hundreds of health professionals through our monthly scientific forums and to the general public through our newsletters and social media sites
- Authoring key, high-impact journal articles on the rationale for sex inclusion in all cell, tissue, animal, and human research that are changing policy at the National Institute of Health and the Federal Drug Administration
- Creating mentorship opportunities that feed the pipeline of women in the biomedical sciences
- Developing interactive tools to help women make informed decisions about their health
- Serving as an authoritative source about women's health research to the national media outlets
- Funding pilot projects that examine sex differences and help advance the careers and funding for young investigators committed to sex inclusion

This past year has seen many notable policy shifts towards sex-inclusion in research, thanks in large part to the Institute's advocacy. We must collectively capitalize on this forward momentum as we enter the new year and redefine comprehensive health for both men and women.

**Benefit Performance of The How and the Why**

In February 2014, the Women's Health Research Institute (WHRI) partnered with TimeLine Theatre Company in their production of *The How and the Why*, a compelling play about science, family, and survival of the fittest. The WHRI provided professional, authoritative information to TimeLine and sponsored a benefit performance underwritten by The Joseph & Bessie Feinberg Foundation, where proceeds directly supported the programs and services of the Women's Health Research Institute. The benefit performance drew so much interest that the Institute sponsored a panel discussion (featuring scenes from the actresses in *The How and the Why*) on the issues that surfaced in the play. The panelists included women students and faculty in science and medicine who discussed the roles of women within science academia.

**Monthly Research Forums**

Our monthly research forums address the lack of awareness among health professionals and researchers that sex and gender matter in health and disease. Each month features a new topic and presenter addressing a new facet of sex-based medicine or research. Our 10 research forums of 2014 drew a collective audience of over 2,000 guests and covered topics ranging from bionics to rheumatology to menopause and musculoskeletal health. We encourage you to
review our past forum lecture notes here and register for upcoming lectures in 2015.

Each May our monthly forum features a special guest and an expanded forum in celebration of National Women's Health Week. In May, 2014, our keynote speaker Mercedes Carnethon, PhD presented "Metabolically Healthy Obese: Reality or Fantasy?" and nearly 30 organizations set up informational tables and 25 researchers presented scientific posters on women's health. This event was a great success and our 2015 May event promises even greater opportunities for community members and researchers to share knowledge.

**Treating Women Differently: The Case for Sex-Based Medicine**

In response to requests from clinicians and researchers, the Women's Health Research Institute, in collaboration with Northwestern Medicine, facilitated a half day of workshops focused on enhancing patient care through awareness of sex- and gender-based differences in different medical disciplines. These workshops featured experts from Cardiology, Dermatology, Neurology, Psychiatry, and Pelvic Health.

These workshops were incredibly well-attended and successful. The Institute's National Women's Health Week event in May will feature several additional workshops and will be open to all researchers and clinicians.

**The Women's Health Science Program Expansion**

The Women's Health Science Program offers free summer academies to high school girls in Chicago Public Schools to learn research and clinical skills on Northwestern's medical campus. Our 2014 summer academy graduated 24 students who gained invaluable experience shadowing Northwestern clinicians, medical students, and graduate students.

The Women's Health Science Program received funding from the 2014 Alumnae of Northwestern Grant to expand into a pilot year-long mentoring program. The Women's Health Science Mentoring Program is an 11-month-long mentoring program for high school girls and female graduate students and medical students.
at Northwestern University. This program is designed to foster relationships and opportunities to study specific areas of scientific interest via one-on-one mentoring partnerships. The program culminates in the completion of a self-selected research project that the pairs present at the WHRI annual Women's Health event in May. Our pilot year underway with its first cohort of eight high school students and 8 graduate and medical student mentors.

Women in Science Journal Club

In 2014, the Women's Health Research Institute launched its first year of the Women in Science Journal club, a nine-month-long journal club and mentoring program for postdoctoral research faculty and tenured science faculty at Northwestern University. This program is designed to facilitate conversations on the culture of women in science academia as well as cultivate mentoring relationships and networking opportunities between women faculty at different career stages.

The goals of this program are to:

- Develop relationships and cultivate networking opportunities with female science and medical faculty at all career stages
- Explore the climate of science academia through informal conversations with other women in the field
- Read and discuss surfacing literature on science academia and explore mechanisms to incite change where needed
- Be empowered with gained knowledge and support systems to persist and advance as women in science academia

The Women in Science Journal Club has already spurred much interest and the WHRI is excited to see how this program evolves in 2015.

The Illinois Men's Health Registry

In 2014, the WHRI began creating the Illinois Men's Health Registry to complement the Illinois Women's Health Registry in an effort to improve access to research studies for both sexes. This registry will be a database containing answers to a confidential health survey. The questions asked are about symptoms, conditions, diseases, family history of disease, environmental exposures, stress, and demographic information. Once live later in 2015, the Illinois Men's Health Registry will allow men to gain access to groundbreaking research studies and clinical trials to improve sex-based medicine.

WHRI in the News
With the many policy changes in 2014, several WHRI leadership members have been cited in the news. Most notably, the Women's Health Research Institute collaborated with the CBS 60 Minutes episode "Sex Matters: Drugs Can Affect Sexes Differently," which featured segment extras with Dr. Teresa Woodruff and Dr. Melina Kibbe. Furthermore, The Colbert Report featured clips from the 60 Minutes segment and further highlighted the necessity to include male and female animals at the research level. Dr. Woodruff and Dr. Kibbe were also featured on WTTW, Chicago Tonight to discuss ending the gender bias in research. Articles by Dr. Kibbe and other WHRI Leadership Council members continue to be cited in arguments for the improved inclusion of sex-based variables in animal studies as well as improved guidelines for journals publishing studies that disclose the sex of study participants.

The Women's Health Research Institute's leaders are major players in the move to change NIH policies towards sex inclusion in research. Continued media and publication presence is essential to capitalize on this momentum and move forward into 2015!

Notable publications of 2014:

**Why It's Crucial to Get More Women Into Science**, National Geographic

**Pregnant Women Must be Studied Too**, The Conversation

**Where Are All the Female Test Subjects?** The Atlantic

**Medical Research Rarely Uses Female Test Subjects**, The Chicago Tribune

**The Sitdown: Teresa Woodruff is a Driving Force for Sex Equity in Medical Science**, The Chicago Sun Times

**NIH Takes Steps to Address Sex Differences in Preclinical Research**, National Institutes of Health

The Women's Health Research Institute has had an exciting year and we look forward to another successful year in 2015. Thank you for your continued support as we collectively work towards more personalized sex-based research and medicine.

Author: Megan Castle, Program Coordinator, Women's Health Research Institute
Institute Happenings

January 20, 2015, 12:00-1:00pm Monthly Research Forum featuring Kirstie K. Danielson, Ph.D., Assistant Professor in the Division of Transplant Surgery and Epidemiology & Biostatistics at the University of Illinois at Chicago presenting Sex from Bench to Bedside: How Investigating Sex Differences Could Ultimately Help Cure Diabetes. Register today!

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Northwestern University | Inst for Women's Health Rsrch | 30E E Superior St, Lurie 10-121 | Chicago | IL | 60611