

MAPHM Symposium 2017

20th October 2017

Abstract Title:

Exploring barriers to women's leadership in the healthcare setting in the Maltese Islands

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Abstract

Background

Although 75% of the global health workforce is made up of women, women leaders in healthcare remain significantly underrepresented with only 38% holding top leadership positions. Only 18% of hospital CEOs and 14% of healthcare boards of directors are women whereas only 15.9% have reached full professorship. Women doctors bring excellent qualities and results into medical services, yet the talent pipeline of women in medical and clinical leadership roles needs to be further enhanced. Literature shows that there is a considerable range of barriers in women's equal leadership opportunities in healthcare and this study aims to explore the nature of identified barriers to women's leadership and to acquire more in-depth understanding of their prevalence in various healthcare leadership facets, namely the academic, clinical and medical domains. It is important because the gender mainstreaming and gender equality in the industry's facets may be addressed by further exploring the nature of the barriers and their prevalence. Potential gaps in strategies, policies and services addressing equality and diversity in healthcare will also be explored.

Method

A qualitative study was carried out whereby 18 healthcare leaders (9 men and 9 women) participated in semi structured interviews addressing the research question "exploring the barriers to women's leadership in country's healthcare setting". These interviews were used in order to gain grounded consultations and develop inductively a grounded theory around the research question.

Results

The main barrier identified is the "carer" role of women that requires them to "put their careers on hold" when family members, young or old, require support and assistance. This indicates the need for better support systems that can allow them to continue pursuing their career while still providing the care and support that loved ones require.

Message

Women in leadership positions in healthcare bring excellent qualities and results to medical services. This study aims to explore the nature of identified barriers to women's leadership in order to identify ways in which these barriers can be addressed and surpassed.



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Similarly, potential gaps in strategies, policies and services addressing equality and diversity in healthcare will also be explored with the aim of facilitating the progression of women in order to occupy leadership positions in health care.