



# **GENDER EQUITY STANDARDS FOR WONCA SCIENTIFIC MEETINGS**

**Prepared by the Wonca Working Party on Women and Family Medicine  
University of East Anglia, Norwich, United Kingdom**

## **“GES CONFERENCE RECOMMENDATIONS”**

**MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOAL # 3: Promote gender equity and empower women.<sup>1</sup>**

**Target by 2015:**

**Eliminate gender disparity at all levels of education by 2015 and empower women.<sup>1</sup>**

### **Introduction**

In the past decade, Wonca joined the United Nations, the World Health Organization, the World Bank and other influential international bodies in recognising gender as a key determinant of the health of individuals and their societies. Wonca, whose mission is to improve the quality of life of the peoples of the world, endorsed the Beijing Platform for Action in Durban in 2001, and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in Singapore in 2001, both strong declarations of the critical need for the empowerment of women to achieve optimal health and quality of life.

Gender affects every theme or topic in medicine and influences health outcomes. It is a determinant of health and shapes the experience of health and illness. Gender often constitutes a barrier to health care. Men and women’s differing status affects their experiences in the health care system both as patients and providers, and as learners and educators.

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<sup>1</sup> The **19th Wonca World Conference of Family Doctors** in Cancun in 2010 presents the opportunity to get in touch with the latest scientific breakthroughs in family medicine, concerning research as well as clinical and lecturing issues. The theme of the conference will be **"THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS (MDGs): THE CONTRIBUTION OF FAMILY MEDICINE"**. The programme will be structured around MDGs more strongly linked to Family Medicine, and will respond also to Wonca Goals and scientific needs of family doctors from the seven Wonca geographical regions. This conference sets the stage for role modelling and supporting gender equity in all Wonca scientific conference. (For more information see [http://www.wonca2010cancun.com/programa\\_tema.php](http://www.wonca2010cancun.com/programa_tema.php))

In 2007, the Wonca World Council unanimously endorsed the HER Statement, The Hamilton Equity Recommendations Statement, at the 18<sup>th</sup> Wonca International Conference in Singapore. The Council endorsed four fundamental recommendations promoting gender equity. One recommendation addresses the importance of gender equity in all scientific conferences. This second fundamental recommendation states: *Implement gender equity in all activities of Wonca, in particular the scientific programmes of its triennial, regional, and rural meetings.*

Wonca convenes triennial world conferences, international rural and regional meetings as key educational events for knowledge transfer and exchange between family doctors/general practitioners. These meetings attract member organisations and physicians from around the world and are a forum to showcase renowned speakers and new medical discoveries through plenary sessions, panel discussions, symposia, workshops, short presentations and posters.

Wonca has international authority and responsibility in setting the standards and agenda for other organisations around the world. Wonca scientific committees set the bar for defining what is important, innovative, and exciting in family medicine education, and Wonca-related scientific conferences contribute to improving world health by thoughtfully and proactively promoting key initiatives when planning and convening events.

The following *Gender Equity Standards for Wonca Scientific Meetings* elaborates on the recommended quality standards to be adopted by organisations and committees planning such meetings. The document was discussed and endorsed by all participants attending the WWPWFM interim meeting at the University of East Anglia, Norwich, U.K. on the 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2009. The signatories hope that this document will be endorsed by the Wonca World Council and adopted by host committees and other organisations in convening meetings and form the basis of a measure of gender equity in assessing Wonca's response to Millennium Development Goal #3: *Promote gender equity and empower women.* Also, Wonca's newly proposed Organisational Equity Committee can use these standards to monitor how well Wonca implements the HER Statement, Recommendation #2: *Implement gender equity in all activities of Wonca, in particular the scientific programmes of its triennial, regional, and rural meetings.*

## **GENDER EQUITY STANDARDS FOR WONCA SCIENTIFIC MEETINGS**

The following short version of the gender equity quality standards are elaborated in detail below.

- 1. Committee structure.** All committees involved in planning and convening scientific meetings adhere to basic principles of gender balance and gender equity.

2. **Programme content.** The programme incorporates gender equity throughout its implementation. All themes of the scientific meetings include a gender perspective or analysis. All calls for proposals for plenary, symposia, workshops explicitly request a gender consideration. No gender restrictions/bias in participation. Women's health topics are encouraged regardless of the theme for the meeting.
3. **Gender balance.** All scientific committees plan for gender balance for invited speakers for plenaries, workshops and symposia.
4. **Plenary speakers.** Deserving women are purposefully and proactively considered as speakers.
5. **Bursaries.** The Host Organising Committee or the bursary committee makes every reasonable effort to purposefully increase the pool of funds available, and distribute bursaries in a gender equitable fashion.
6. **Leadership development.** Scientific committees make every reasonable effort to promote leadership development at each conference.
7. **Family activities** The Host Organising Committee collaborates with participants who are parents in order to facilitate appropriate arrangements for accessible childcare for infants, toddlers and school-age children.
8. **Social Events.** The Host Organising Committee ensures that all social activities offered as part of the regular conference programme are respectful of the gender, national origin, and ethnicity of participants and their guests, and that highly sexualised humour or events, and/or demeaning comments will not be tolerated.
9. **Corporate sponsorship and marketing.** The scientific committee organising Wonca meetings restrict external sponsors that conduct policy or market products that adversely affect women. Every effort is made to restrict imagery or products that objectify women or that make deceptive claims.
10. **Interactive educational styles.** Scientific committees encourage invited speakers to adopt interactive teaching and learning styles, and include this encouragement in the calls for proposals for each meeting.

### **Further elaboration of the Gender Equity Standards for Wonca Scientific Meetings**

1. **Committee structure.** *All committees involved in planning and convening scientific meetings adhere to basic principles of gender balance and gender equity.* In practice this means that every reasonable effort is made to ensure that all committees planning

scientific meetings have equitable gender balance and promote women in leadership positions and roles. One of the women members on each committee should be designated with the responsibility to ensure gender standards are maintained.

- 2. Programme content.** *The programme incorporates gender equity throughout its implementation.* A gender perspective or analysis transforms usual discourse to recognise that gender is always involved in any discussion about health, although not always explicitly. <2> This means that whatever the topic (genetics, pharmaceuticals, technology, or health services), every Wonca speaker should consider how the chosen theme relates to women's health and status.

  - *All themes of the scientific meetings include a gender perspective.*
  - *All calls for proposals for plenary, symposia, workshops explicitly request a gender perspective in submissions.*
  - *No gender restrictions/bias in participation are acceptable.* No workshop, symposium or event should restrict participation on the basis of gender.
  - *Women's health topics are encouraged regardless of the theme for the conference* in keeping with the HER Statement, fundamental recommendation # 3: "Promulgate the pivotal role of gender as a key determinant of health" and the "10 Steps to Gender Equity and Health".
- 3. Gender balance.** *All scientific committees and event organisers plan for gender balance for invited speakers for plenary sessions, workshops and symposia* with attention in advance to the need for such balance rather than token inclusion as afterthought. Through role modelling, women will see themselves reflected in leadership and envision the potential to become such leaders themselves. Men will see women in the roles of exemplary leaders and foster such leadership.
- 4. Plenary speakers.** *Deserving women are purposefully and proactively considered as speakers.* Highly accomplished women are often overlooked in choosing plenary speakers, especially where women are underrepresented among those making the decisions and where it is culturally uncommon to consider women for those positions. Wonca scientific committees use resources such as the Organizational Equity Committee and the Working Party on Women and Family Medicine to identify potential plenary speakers.
- 5. Bursaries** (financial assistance and sponsorship). *The Host Organising Committee or the bursary committee makes every reasonable effort to purposefully increase the pool of funds available, and distribute bursaries in a gender equitable fashion.* Bursaries are tools to promote participation of those members who have financial challenges and deserve support. Historically, bursaries have favored men over women, as men more often hold office, have recognized leadership roles, or academic status. However, many of those in need of financial incentives come from

countries where more women than men are family physicians and where women earn disproportionately less than men. These Wonca Councils, scientific meeting Host Organising Committees, Wonca membership organisations and their bursary committees make every reasonable effort to purposefully increase the pool of funds available, and distribute bursaries in a gender equitable fashion. Bursary sources, deadlines and allocation are systematic and transparent, and criteria should address equity of opportunity for women and developing countries. Recipients of bursaries/scholarships are not obliged to advocate/promote the funder's special interest after or during the meetings.

- 6. Leadership development.** *Scientific committees make every reasonable effort to promote leadership development at each conference.* In addition to workshops and seminars on specific aspects of leadership development, other opportunities to enhance leadership development are identified, such as opportunities to chair sessions. These could include mentoring young physicians, inviting young physicians to committee meetings, and/or encouraging young physicians to take on leadership roles in smaller endeavors. The content of leadership development sessions includes how gender affects leadership styles and participation in organizations. The planning and implementing of such leadership development opportunities reflects the particular challenges facing women, while recognising that many issues, such as managing work/family issues or advocating with more powerful colleagues are generic issues, of interest to all physicians.
- 7. Family activities.** *The Host Organising Committee collaborates with participants who are parents in order to facilitate appropriate arrangements for accessible childcare for infants, toddlers and school-age children, including private space for breastfeeding pairs and the possibility of supervised activity for older children at local sites of interest.* The programme allows for reasonable interaction with family, and encourages flexibility in organization of meals to accommodate families with children. There is adequate time for registrants to refresh and re-generate, and to network and socialize with colleagues. Programmes for those accompanying physicians should be geared to both genders and to a diverse audience. The agenda should highlight which plenary and/or other scientific sessions might be of interest to those accompanying registered family physicians. Costs, accommodation and access should also take family needs into account.
- 8. Social events:** Social events provide registrants with an opportunity to relax with longstanding and new colleagues. *The Host Organising Committee ensures that all social activities offered as part of the regular conference programme are respectful of the gender, national origin, and ethnicity of participants and their guests, and that highly sexualised humour or events, and/or demeaning comments are not tolerated.*

**9. Corporate marketing, external sponsorship:** *The scientific committee organising Wonca meetings restrict external sponsors that conduct policy or market products that adversely affect women. Every effort is made to restrict imagery or products that objectify women or that make deceptive claims.* As many medical organisations, including Wonca (Europe), now place limits on corporate marketing and external sponsorship of educational sessions, the scientific organising committee of Wonca meetings reflects on whether a proposed external sponsor conducts policy or markets products that adversely affect women. Every effort is made to restrict imagery or products that objectify women or that make deceptive claims. In particular, we recommend Wonca's endorsement of and adherence to the WHO/UNICEF 1981 International Code on Marketing of Breast Milk Substitutes, which outlines the ethical guidelines for the marketing of infant formula.<3> Most member countries of Wonca reaffirmed their support for the Code at the 1994 World Health Assembly. The medical associations of many member countries have also endorsed the Code and included the Code in their guidelines for the ethical association with the external sponsors.

**10. Promote interactive educational styles.** *Scientific committees encourage invited speakers to adopt interactive teaching and learning styles where appropriate and include this encouragement in the calls for proposals for each meeting.* Hierarchical, authoritative teaching styles can entrench dominating behaviors and gender biases, and discourage effective engagement of all participants, especially women. Presenters as well as learners have great diversity such as gender, language, culture, religion, age, experience, expertise, geography and learning styles. Interactive techniques encourage self reflection, personal growth, small group learning, time for questions and answers and follow up reminders.

**References:**

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3. WHO International Code on Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes 1981. [http://www.who.int/nutrition/publications/code\\_english.pdf](http://www.who.int/nutrition/publications/code_english.pdf) (accessed 21 June 2009)

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*Signed in Norwich on 2 July 2009*

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