Urological Health in Women Across the Lifespan: An Interdisciplinary Research Network

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**Background**

- Urological problems are common in women across the lifespan and significantly impact their daily life, yet remain understudied.
- Urinary incontinence (UI) direct costs for women are over $12 billion in the United States.¹
- UI affects approximately 24% of 18-44 year old women and nearly 50% of community-dwelling women over the age of 65.²
- The stigma of UI prevents the overwhelming majority of women with UI from discussing symptoms with their healthcare provider.³
- Over 50% of patients with a serious illness rated bowel and bladder incontinence a fate worse than death.⁴

**Network Formation**

To form an Interdisciplinary Network and promote this style of collaboration required careful selection of members across various disciplines and their commitment to frequent meetings over several years. The Urological Health in Women Across the Lifespan Interdisciplinary Network was launched in 2014.

**Network Rationale**

The Society for Women’s Health Research (SWHR®) recognized the need to have researchers and clinicians work collaboratively to define the current state of knowledge, gaps, and recommendations for future directions in urological health in women. The Network model rests on the following key principles:

- **The best people**
- **Multi-year**
- **Interdisciplinary and multi-sites**
- **Peer-driven science and the right question**

**Typical Network Timeline**

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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Activities</th>
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| 1    | • Network Formation; Elect Chair  
|      |   • Brainstorm ideas, identify knowledge gaps and needs  
|      |   • Establish collaborative relationships |
| 2-4  | • Plan and implement studies or programs based on gaps and needs  
|      |   • Develop products  
|      |   • Establish collaborative relationships |
| 5    | • Finalize products  
|      |   • Evaluate goals and products  
|      |   • Hold symposium to highlight products |

**Mission**

Raise awareness of the impact of bladder health on women’s well-being across the lifespan. Since unhealthy bladders disproportionately affect women and girls the Network aims to:

- Review current information and identify knowledge gaps and make recommendations to inform research, policy, and education.
- Raise awareness through advocacy among agencies, patient advocacy groups and medical societies.
- Promote education among health care providers, educators, and the general public.

**Products**

Educational Outreach

- **Huffington Post Blog Series**
  - One More Mom-To-Teenage-Daughter Talk: The School Bathroom.
  - What is a Healthy Bladder?
  - School Bathroom Habits Impact Life-Long Bladder Health: Opening the Door to the Girls’ Room.

- **Peer Reviewed Articles**

**Current Members**

- Elizabeth Mueller, MD, MSME, Loyola University*  
- Margot Damaser, PhD, Cleveland Clinic **
- Cindy Amundsen, MD, Duke University
- Toby Chai, MD, Yale University
- Clare Close, MD, Close Pediatric Urology
- Michael DiSanto, PhD, Rowan University
- Matthew Fraser, PhD, Duke University
- Stephanie Kielb, MD, Northwestern University
- George Kuchel, MD, University of Connecticut
- Elizabeth Mueller, MD, Loyola University
- Mary Palmer, PhD, RN, UNC at Chapel Hill
- Candace Parker-Autry, MD, Wake Forest University
- Alan Wolfe, PhD, Loyola University

*Network Chair; ** Network Co-Chair

**Funding**

This Network is made possible by generous funding from Astellas Pharma US, Inc., Allergan, Plc, Cook Medical, and Kimberly-Clark Corp.

**References**