

Advancing Diversity in Research

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Diverse organizations make better decisions and have better results (*J Corporate Finance* 2014;28:185-2000; *Proc Natl Acad Sci USA* 2014;111:18524-9). In homogeneous groups, less time is spent considering options, while diverse groups can call on a wider variety of perspectives. When they present to or work in a diverse group, individuals prepare more thoroughly (*Sci Am* 2014;311:42-7). When highly-qualified individuals are not recruited and retained due to unconscious bias and other barriers, organizations, research, and health care equity all suffer.

Across STEM disciplines, including anesthesiology, women are underrepresented in federal research funding (*J Womens Health (Larchmt)* 2017;26:560-70), as authors of scientific studies (*Anesth Analg* 2019;129:306-10), as keynote speakers (*PLoS One* 2013;8:e79147), and on editorial boards (*Anesth Analg* 2019;129:306-10), although there is slow progress. Publications with women co-authors, however, are more cited than those with only male authors (*PLoS One* 2013;8:e79147).

Identifying and recruiting diverse candidates requires confronting ingrained practices; retaining those recruits requires reinventing culture and environment (*J Infect Dis* 2019;220:S33-S41).

While FAER grantees mirror the gender distribution within recent graduates, FAER recognizes the imperative to increase the diversity of the organization, program participants, and applicants for early-career grants. The FAER Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Task Force, chaired by Daniel J. Cole, MD, FASA, is examining the current state of diversity across FAER and will recommend potential internal and external strategies and initiatives to address identified opportunities at the fall 2020 FAER Board of Directors meeting.

FAER is committed to promoting inclusivity and the importance of diversity in our specialty. We reached out to several women supported by FAER grants and programs to get their thoughts on the positive impact diversity has on research and medicine.

“Prioritizing a diverse physician-scientist workforce means representation of unique perspectives, research ideas and insight into challenges. Representation matters because comprehensive research is crucial to elucidating issues and finding solutions that improve the health of patients and of communities.

When I applied for the FAER Medical Student Anesthesia Research Fellowship (MSARF), I was a second-year medical student who had recently discovered the field of anesthesiology. My interest in health disparities and public health were shaped by my experiences as an immigrant from a low-income background. Therefore, I was excited to work with Dr. Paloma Toledo, an obstetric anesthesiologist, whose research focuses on racial and ethnic disparities in the use of labor epidural analgesia. During my MSARF, I not only immersed myself in the research process, but also witnessed compassionate patient care and made wonderful friendships.

I am grateful for the professional and personal growth I experienced through this program. My MSARF experiences also contributed significantly to my decision to pursue a career in anesthesiology and in academic medicine.”

—Catherine Gao
(FAER MSARF Participant 2018)

“I sincerely appreciate the support of FAER for my research and my development as a physician-scientist. Research has always been my passion and, after working clinically for a number of years, I was thrilled to receive the FAER award last summer. The Mentored Research Training Grant (MRTG) allowed me to devote most of my time on my project in women’s health and I have grown tremendously towards research independence. Even now, when most of us work at the front lines of the pandemic, the trust and recognition of the FAER award inspire me to move my project forward as much as possible. By supporting the work of physician-scientists from diverse backgrounds, FAER allows different ideas to succeed, which will bring a better future to our entire specialty. Mentors from diverse cultural, geographic, and social backgrounds have played an essential role in my life and empowered me to pursue and achieve my goals regardless of stereotypes.”

—Vesela Kovacheva
(FAER MRTG Recipient 2019)

“As an African American woman, I can speak to the psychological benefit of being able to see yourself reflected in the world around you. Whether it is as a scientist, senator, or astronaut, aspirations are supported when the surrounding images are similar to what is seen in the mirror every day. The scientific community strives to advance research and health care for the good of society. Diversity is an important factor in this challenge in order to bring marginalized voices to the forefront, learn from the unique experiences of others, and grow in our perceptions and understanding of our fellow humans. FAER has provided me not only the opportunity to contribute to the national scientific workspace but be a role model and encourage other female minorities and budding physician-scientists who are looking for that reflection.”

—Brittney Williams
(FAER MRTG Recipient 2019)

“Early in my medical school journey, I felt discouraged by the relatively small number of female anesthesiology faculty members in leadership capacities around me. I began questioning whether it was possible to balance the demands of advancement in academic medicine with responsibilities outside of it. This is why having a diverse group of physician-scientists as mentors and role models has been especially important to me as an early-stage trainee. I appreciate FAER’s efforts in supporting the next generation of talented researchers in anesthesiology in a manner that promotes inclusivity. Creating opportunities for physicians with unique backgrounds and perspectives fosters innovation that is vital to the advancement of the specialty. The diverse community of FAER-funded researchers and their contributions enable all young trainees, including myself, to dream big regarding the impact they can have as future researchers and clinicians in anesthesiology.”

—Megha Vipani
(FAER MSARF Participant 2018)



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“January 2020 was an interesting time to start on a FAER Research Fellowship Grant (RFG). When our labs shut down to save PPE and enforce social isolation two months into my research, I had the opportunity to continue my clinical training and contribute to our field at the front line of the COVID-19 pandemic, with FAER promising a grant extension when the research environment may become more secure. However, this global threat was revealing in many ways. Research, is above all, based on international collaboration and information sharing and thrives in a stable, secure environment. As an immigrant myself, I commiserate with the fear of colleagues from around the world whose research careers are now uncertain, whose residence in their current home is now threatened and who face increasing xenophobia. We saw who the truly vulnerable populations are, and how minority populations are disproportionately affected. At the same time, I saw ICU and OR anesthesiologists collaborating globally in beautiful ways, publishing in open, accessible media, to share their own techniques for fighting contagion, protecting their peers, and saving lives. Let’s make sure we continue to value perspectives outside our own institutions and borders. Let’s make sure we continue to make progress together in science and medicine and continue open sharing of techniques, resources, and reagents. Let’s make sure we don’t leave the most vulnerable of us behind with our discoveries.” ■

—Yifan Xu
(FAER RFG Recipient 2019)

