

Women in Thoracic Surgery

A Brief History

1986-2003

Mission of the Women in Thoracic Surgery

The mission of Women in Thoracic Surgery is to further the achievements of women practicing thoracic surgery by providing mutual support and facilitating professional advancement.

Goals of Its Membership

Provide quality care to our patients

Mentor young women interested in pursuing careers in thoracic and cardiac surgery

Provide educational opportunities for our members

Educate the public, especially women, regarding cardiac and pulmonary health and disease

1985-1990

In 1986 Dr. Leslie Kohman first organized an informal breakfast meeting for women thoracic surgeons at the Society of Thoracic Surgeons meeting. The enthusiasm of the eight who attended to network with one another, especially given the barriers of distance and practice commitments, led Dr. Kohman to recruit Baxter-Edwards and Medtronic to fund regular, semi-annual breakfast/luncheon meetings of the nascent organization at each national professional society annual meeting.

In the mid-1980's the membership of women cardiothoracic surgeons in these professional societies was rather sparse. Dr. Nina Braunwald became the first woman member of the American Association of Thoracic Surgeons in 1964, and both she and her contemporary Dr. Ann Stitt (the first woman to finish a cardiothoracic surgery residency) were members of the Society of Thoracic Surgery.

More women became members of AATS when Drs. Patricia McCormack and Lynda Mickelborough were elected to membership in 1989. Election of Drs. Kohman, Swain, and Hartz rapidly followed.

By September of 1987 Drs. Grace Blair, Sharon Bogarty, Nora Burgess, and Julie Swain had been elected members of the Society of Thoracic Surgeons. In September of 1988 Drs. Renee Hartz, Leslie Kohman, Patricia Ann Penkoske and Carolyn Reed joined them.

In 1988 the first Women in Cardiothoracic Surgery newsletter, edited by Dr. Sharon Bogarty, was sent to 30 women surgeons. An outreach effort began to invite as many women surgeons as could be identified, including residents, who were interested in the field to participate. Promedica International assumed funding for a regularly published newsletter for reports to the group on meeting and membership activities.

By August of 1988, however, there were still fewer than ten women surgeons attending meetings and discussions among the members present at

the American Association of Thoracic Surgeons annual meeting. This led the group to renew and expand efforts to engage potential members in the organization. Goals were set to provide moral support and encouragement to women in training or contemplating a career in thoracic surgery, to disseminate information about residencies, faculty positions, research and clinical opportunities, and to interact with other groups of professional women.

As the decade closed the WCTS had a membership of 84 with an increasing participation among residents interested in training in the field as well as practicing in other countries. The latter included representatives from Australia, Bulgaria, Canada, China, France, India, Germany, and Sweden.

1990-2000

In 1991 six more women thoracic surgeons were elected to the STS: Drs. Margaret Allen, Phyllis Edwards, Mary Mancici, Carolyn Shaffer, Sharon Siegel, and Donna Waite. This raised the number of women in that organization to 20. Increased participation of WTS members in national professional societies continued throughout the decade.

Dr. Julie Swain was appointed to the Education and Resources as well as the Postgraduate Education committees of the STS. Six months later Drs. Leslie Kohman and Carolyn Reed were appointed to the Executive Committee of the Thoracic Surgeons group of Cancer and Leukemia Group B (CALGB) and Dr. Julie Swain was appointed to the Civilian Review Panel for Military Medicine. Dr. Swain also became the fourth woman to become a member of the AATS in this period.

Newsletter content expanded to include not only notes on personal professional advancements but information on publications, grant writing,

and forum discussions. These were supplemented by membership mentoring on society committee participation (Dr. Julie Swain), medical treatment of women with cardiovascular/thoracic diseases (Dr. Renee Hartz), the practice of Eastern and Western medicine in Hong Kong during the 1960's (Dr. Patricia McCormack), and thoracic oncology research (Dr. Valerie Rusch).

The first WTS Bylaws were drafted in 1992 under the leadership of WTS President, Dr. Phyllis Edwards.

Dr. Carolyn Dresler initiated a survey of women in cardiothoracic surgery with the goal of understanding the root factors causing persistent under-representation of minority representation of women in this field. This was published in the Archives of Surgery, 1996.

Within the year 1993 three members of the Society became Chiefs of Cardiothoracic Surgery in their respective institutions.

Two were academic Chiefs of Cardiothoracic Surgery (Drs. Renee Hartz at University of Illinois and Julie Swain at University of Nevada/Las Vegas). Dr. Hartz led a department in its growth from one surgeon to five and successful establishment of a residency program.

One was at the largest HMO in the United States (Dr. Nora Burgess who became Chief of Cardiovascular Surgery at Kaiser Permanente Medical Center, San Francisco during its growth to 1400 cardiac cases per year).

In 1996 Dr. Carolyn Reed became the next woman to be elected a member of the AATS. She was also elected a director of the American Board of Thoracic Surgery in 1997.

In the spring 1994 issue, newsletter distribution under the banner title of the Oracle and sponsorship of Scanlon International, broke the 100 mark for the first time at a circulation of 118 names.

The society's name was also modified the following year, to Women in Thoracic Surgery, so that it would be more properly descriptive of the full range of professional interests of its membership. This change aligned the

name with the specialty definition agreed upon by the STS and the AATS to clearly include the practices of general thoracic surgery, cardiovascular surgery for adults and congenital heart surgery.

In 1997-1999 new by-laws were developed and the society was incorporated as well.

Professional advancement and leadership development opportunities abounded in the late 1990's for WTS members. By 1997 over a dozen WTS members were active participant members of STS committees, a new high water mark of the mentoring and advancement efforts by all of its members. In 1998 two WTS members (Drs. Kathy Lee Santangelo and Carolyn Reed) attended academic career professional development courses for which the WL Gore company provided grants.

In 1998 Dr. Constance Haan and in 1999 Dr. Nora Burgess attended the Harvard University Kennedy School of Government course on the current medical economics of health care in the United States.

In 1999 Dr. Rosalyn Scott, President of WTS, was featured in a educational documentary on women surgeons produced by the Association of Women Surgeons, the Office of Science Education, and the Office of Research on Women's Health at the National Institutes of Health. It was designed to be distributed to schools as part of an effort to encourage students, particularly young girls and women, to consider careers in medicine and surgery.

2000-2003

Early in 2000, the result of much hard work by many members of the society, WTS and STS jointly produced The Women in Thoracic Surgery Symposium. This event celebrated the achievements of the 98 women who to date had become boarded by the American Board of Thoracic Surgery.

Over 300 people attended and its content was published as a supplement to the Annals of Thoracic Surgery in February 2001.

Surgeons initiated as honorary surgeon members initiated were Drs. Eugene Braunwald, Delos Cosgrove III, Nicholas Kouchoukos, F. Griffith Pearson, Gerald Ranier, and Robert Repogle.

Corporate sponsors (Baxter Healthcare, Ethicon/Ethicon-Endosurgery, St. Jude Medical, Atrium Medical, Cryolife, Medtronic, and W.L. Gore and Associates) were also recognized and thanked for their generous support of this endeavor.

Additionally, institutional members were honored (Brigham and Women's Hospital, Massachusetts General Hospital, John Hopkins University, Medical University of South Carolina, Tulane University, University of Miami, University of Pennsylvania, University of Rochester, and the University of Wisconsin).

Further refinements of the WTS as a professional organization included incorporation as a nonprofit organization, choice of a logo, approval of final bylaws, and establishment of the WTS as a member organization of the CTSNet.

Dr. Valerie Rusch became Chief of Thoracic Surgery at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, New York in 2000 and received further recognition when appointed to the American Board of Thoracic Surgery in 2002.

Having served her 6-year term as a director on the ABTS along with Dr. Rusch, Dr. Carolyn Reed was chosen President-Elect of that body for a term to start 2003.

As the society moved into 2002 & 2003 its message that the society is a resource for women in thoracic surgery, for cardiac disease in women and lung cancer in women continue to be core issues that remain instrumental in the activities of the organization.

Draft

Prepared by Nora Burgess, MD, WTS Historian
November 2003

*Women in Thoracic Surgery Leadership
Councils*

1986-1988

President

Leslie Kohman

Newsletter Editor

Sharon Bogarty

1989-1991

President

Leslie Kohman

Treasurer or Secretary/Treasurer

Nora Burgess

Newsletter Editor

Phyllis Edwards/Darlene Goldstein

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1992-1995

President

Phyllis Edwards

Vice President

Shauna Roberts

Treasurer or Secretary/Treasurer

Patricia McCormack

Newsletter Editor

Altagracia Chavez/Mary Mancini

1996-1998

President

Jemi Olak

Vice President

Mercedes Dullum

Treasurer or Secretary/Treasurer

Carolyn Reed

Newsletter Editor

Anne Billingsly

1999-2000

President

Rosalyn Scott

Vice President

Constance Haan

Treasurer or Secretary/Treasurer

Constance Haan

Newsletter Editor

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2000-2002

President

AJ Carpenter

Vice President

Carolyn Dresler

Treasurer or Secretary/Treasurer

Lorraine Rubis

Newsletter Editor

Mary Boylan

2003-2004

President

Mercedes Dullum

Vice President

Carolyn Dresler

Treasurer or Secretary/Treasurer

Lorraine Rubis

Newsletter Editor

Mary Boylan

Website Editor

Shauna Roberts

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