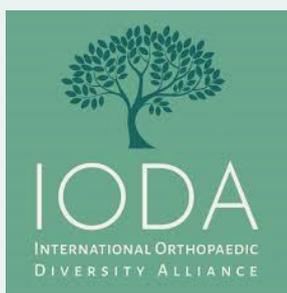


# Women in T&O: Where are we now?

Deborah Eastwood



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**“If they won’t give you a seat at the table, bring a folding chair”**  
- Shirley Chisholm, 1st African-American Woman Elected to Congress

**W**hen this question is posed to me, the retort that springs to mind is often the single word: Everywhere. They should be everywhere that talent, drive and enthusiasm thrive, they should be contributing to all aspects of our professional work be it clinical, research, innovation or leadership. They should be the entrepreneurs that bring about change, that challenge the way we work and how we think.

They should be... but are they?

As I consider the ‘R (-etirement)’ word I reflect back on 40 years working in the NHS. One in three of my medical school year were women but during my registrar and senior registrar training, in almost all respects I was the ‘diversity’. My appointment as a consultant in 1993, meant that overall 4% of consultant surgeons were women: a fact, I neither knew nor cared about (at that time). I was simply delighted to join a profession I loved and my simple aim was to do as good a job as the colleagues I admired, all male but all great surgeons and doctors. However, as time went by, it became increasingly obvious that an essentially single sex profession was neither sustainable nor right. Quietly, to start with, and then with increasing force the drum of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion began to beat and to gain momentum. Change began to take place and more importantly was recognised and encouraged.

In my opinion, the EDI agenda will only truly bring about change if another ‘E’ is added so that what we are working for now is E<sup>2</sup>DI where the second ‘E’ stands for engagement.

We cannot, must not, stand around and expect change to occur without us engaging actively in the process.

I have often used the phrase ‘sowing the seeds of change’ and as we realise that whilst many important strategy and policy documents have been written, discussed and implemented, the change we want will only occur if we engage in bringing it about, I think we have to learn to focus our vision.

As the contributors to this section have highlighted, there are many aspects of our professional life that would benefit from some focussed engagement. We accept that you cannot be what you cannot see, but you can’t contribute, if you don’t join in. Emma Reay’s article highlights the changes that have happened in the world of orthopaedic research encouraging a more diverse involvement to bring about improved outcomes for all. Pleasingly the word ‘women’ does not feature too strongly because in fact the broader concept of diversity is at the heart of her article. Promoting women in T&O simply opens the door for engagement with the many other diverse groups that are part of our profession. We must advocate for others and give them a voice too.

If overall 17% of consultant surgeons are now women, and almost 9% of trauma and orthopaedic surgeons are women, then perhaps we are in a better place to treat our female patients in a more holistic way. Samantha Tross’s article asks us to think about each patient as an individual. In a world of algorithms, I do believe that we are united by our similarities rather than divided by our differences but – and it is a big but, algorithmic care must not come at the expense of an understanding and empathy with the individual patient that comes to us for treatment. After all, women must make up half our patients as they make up half the population – they deserve appropriate care.

We cannot all think outside the box as much as some people can but we can learn and take inspiration from them, and use that to look at our life at home, in our NHS trust, in our own individual workplace and see what we can improve. Chichi Menakaya writes eloquently about taking your skills and using them in different fields to make a difference. She highlights that the core skills that allow us to lead the team through a difficult operation are also the same skills that enable you and I to be leaders in other areas too.

## So where are women now?

We are everywhere we should be. We are advocates for those who have yet to find their voice, we are encouraging the profession to grow. We are focussed on small, grassroots change that will bring about sustainable and impactful alterations in the culture of our profession. ■