

PERSPECTIVE: PART I

FROM GIRL MED TWITTER TO GIRL MED LIVE

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It began in July 2016 when an anonymous medical student tweeted about a first date. Other women in medicine on Twitter responded to the post, first with the phrase “girl med Twitter” and then with #girlmedtwitter.¹ From there, other Twitter users liked, retweeted, commented, and began using the hashtag for their own posts pertaining to life as a woman in medicine. In the ensuing months, #girlmedtwitter became a mainstay of women physicians and medical students on social media, generating thousands of tweets and millions of impressions² and linking women in medicine around the world through shared experiences. The conversations ranged from the basic (what shoes were stylish but able to withstand hours of rounding on an inpatient medicine rotation) to the career focused (how do you find a mentor) to the difficult (how do you respond to sexual harassment from a supervisor).

As this online community grew, participants saw the strength of women supporting women, and wondered if there was a way to translate this network from the realm of social media into real life action to advance women in medicine. Five women came together and formed Girl Med Media Inc., a 501(c)(3) non-profit whose mission is to promote mentorship, provide education, and support the advancement of women in all fields of medicine.³ These founding board members saw the power of what was happening online and asked the question, what could happen if we got this community together in person? The short answer is, a lot. A study of 2,600 women who attended Conferences for Women found that of those women who had attended a conference 15% of them received a greater than 10% pay raise as compared with just 5% of women who had signed up for but not yet attended one of these conferences. In addition, 42% of attendees were promoted during the study period as compared with 18% who had not attended a Conference for Women.⁴ For the founders of Girl Med Media Inc. the achievements women were sharing through #girlmedtwitter revealed the tangible effects of the support, resources, encouragement, and relationships forged online. It was time to bring that energy to a live event.

That is how #GirlMedLive2018 came to be. The Girl Med Media board set the mission “to bring together all of the wonderful women (and men!) who believe in promoting and supporting women, discussing issues affecting women in healthcare, and making sure we all have a seat at the table”.³ The organization raised more than \$5,000 from dozens of supporters to make this event happen, and solicited volunteers via social media to join the CME planning committee. Four of us responded and under the leadership of Joannie Yeh, MD, chief education officer of Girl Med Media Inc, we spent the next several months putting together a 12 credit CME program. We determined our areas of interest to include identifying and addressing gender gaps in medicine, negotiating career advancement, communicating more effectively, and determining adaptive strategies for coping with stress and rekindling the joy of practicing medicine.³ Our learning objectives were very much in line with the American College of Physicians position paper on achieving gender equity in physician compensation and career advancement.⁵ Then we opened a call for speakers. The response was overwhelming. We had submissions from phenomenal women in medicine, some of whom were seasoned, professional speakers and coaches, and some of whom were new to conference speaking, but through #girlmedtwitter had realized they had something important to say.

Over the course of a balmy fall weekend in Dallas, approximately 50 women and men from all facets of medicine came together for two and a half days of learning, networking, and empowerment. #GirlMedLive2018 generated more than 2,000 tweets and more than 8 million impressions. Not bad for such an intimate group. More importantly, participants left the conference having made new connections with peers and mentors and having learned strategies to further their career.

#GirlMedLive2018 captured the magic of the medical Twitter community and proved that these connections formed behind the keyboard are real and can affect

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change in our individual careers and in the culture of medicine. There are many great things to come from Girl Med Media Inc. including the return of #GirlMedLive May 1-3, 2020.

References

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