

**Inaugural Women in Dermatology Leadership Meeting;
A Smashing Success!
By Afsaneh Alavi**

On a rainy Saturday in late April, 63 dermatologists and industry representatives dedicated part of their weekend to the inaugural Women in Dermatology Leadership meeting in Toronto, Canada. Although it was gloomy outside, the energy inside was electric as attendees and panel members shared experiences, best practices and their own stories.

Inspired by the annual WDS January retreat, the meeting offered a full day of networking and education, with an emphasis on the development of leadership skills. Although the room was mainly full of women, nearly a dozen men joined the event, either as panelists or attendees.

The morning kicked off with a welcoming message from Dr. Julie Powell, President of the Canadian Dermatology Association (CDA). Powell's presentation helped set the stage for the day's event. She gave the room an overview of the realities of women in leadership positions across Canada – from the corporate boardroom to the classroom.



Once Powell finished her presentation, she turned the floor over to the event founder Afsaneh Alavi who explained to the group how the idea for the meeting came about, the involvement of the CDA and Women's Dermatologic Society, and she provided an overview of the day's events.

Keeping the energy flowing was vital for the first session on Communications and Leadership. The first speaker, DR. Pearl Grimes, WDS President, from the Vitiligo and Pigmentation Institute of Southern California captivated the room with her talk on building leadership. Grimes pointed out that great leaders, including Martin Luther King, Oprah, and Mahatma Gandhi, have three common attributes: passion, belief, and the ability to move others. The critical takeaway from Grimes' discussion was leaders genuinely engage others at a personal level to make others feel like part of the group.

After Grimes' presentation, the room was pumped and ready for Communication Specialist Marsheila DeVan's highly anticipated first presentation on Communicating with Impact. DeVan began her session by explaining to the group the importance of nonverbal communication. She let the attendees on a little communications secret that only 7% of what we say has an impact on the receiver. It is the other 93%, made up of body language and vocal intonation that sways the recipient to either believe or not believe the message. All participants agreed this was an important takeaway from the meeting that they would use in their practices, meetings, and networking events.



When talking about successful women leaders, it is often helpful to share a story so the audience can easily internalize and remember the message. To help the audience, Janice Murray took the floor to share her journey to the top. Many might know Murray as President of Novartis Canada, but she shared her exciting story starting out in a heavily male-dominated rural Prairie town that laid the foundation for her professional success. Murray used what she learned growing up in her community and carried her parent's belief with her that she can do whatever she wanted, which propelled her into senior roles at CN Railway, and eventually on to Novartis. Murray told attendees that "women need to let go of the fear as it blocks us from achieving what we desire. Everyone fails: it is what we learn from failure and what we will do differently the next time that is important."

Feeling empowered to take on the world attendees then were ready to discuss how to handle situations that life throws at us – from natural disasters to security incidents. Grimes returned to the floor with Dr. Marta Rendon from Rendon Centre for Dermatology & Aesthetic Medicine in Boca Raton, Florida, to discuss disaster management preparation. Both women provided their respective experiences of planning for large-scale fires, earthquakes in California or surviving devastating hurricanes in Florida. Although attendees joked that our most significant concern was an ice storm, even such an event can have a detrimental impact on a business. Grimes and Rendon discussed the importance of creating a crisis management plan for the business, including call trees, and practicing it at least once a year.

Grimes and Rendon also reminded attendees that they need to plan how they are going to reach patients, and thus, how to access the files to call people if they are unable to reach the office.

Once the reality of disaster management settled in, it was time for CDA CEO, Chantal Courchesne and internist Dr. Pegah Shahriaree to tell their poignant personal stories about overcoming their adversities. Both women touched the hearts of many in the room, and their stories will live with many attendees for a long time.

After sharing such personal stories, it was time for the panel discussion on Industry and Physicians chaired by Dr. Vincent Piguet. Drs. Melinda Gooderham and Neil Shear represented the dermatologists, and Chris Halyk from Janssen joined the panel to represent the pharmaceutical industry along with Stéphane Lassignardie of AbbVie and Janice Murray from Novartis. From the discussion, it was clear that the pharmaceutical industry highly values partnerships with physicians, wants to create products that benefit patients in the long run, and lives by their code of ethics. Gooderham made a clear point to the industry panelists that “we [as dermatologists] are partners and we need to learn right from the beginning how something will benefit our patients.”



There was one hot topic that came out of the Industry and Physicians session, and it concerned the issue of “protecting” residents from pharma reps. A few residents in attendance voiced this concern and wanted an understanding of why such a restriction is in place from the medical schools, especially as they needed to learn about medications and build relationships for when they start to practice on their own.

With the room buzzing from all the discussion, it was time to move onto the next topic: World Perspectives on Women in Leadership, as viewed by men. Vancouver’s Dr. David Zloty chaired this session, with panel members Drs. Steven Glassman hailing from South Africa, Vincent Piguet from

Switzerland, and Toronto's Neil Shear. These brave gentlemen gave their perspective on how women can improve their leadership qualities. They stressed the importance of being direct in communication, not using guilt as a motivator (though they did admit it was effective), using the right tone of voice, and avoiding the use of subtleties. The audience understood but directed the panel to discuss issues such as women being pigeonholed into emotional/quality of life type topics at conferences, while men continue to get the efficacy and safety topics. Women also shared their stories of balancing the demands of work and family, and how this juggling impacts leadership and how to best create some balance.



With the energy in the room running high, it was time to hit the topics of Time Management vs. Energy Management. Dermatologist Dr. Marissa Joseph gave an excellent presentation on using technology – including smartphone apps – to maximize time. She shared her list of top apps. Earlier presenter Dr. Marta Rendon gave another presentation on time management tips. Many attendees wrote in their event evaluations that they were going to use technology more, prioritize tasks and find some “me time” to avoid wearing themselves thin.

However, if any dermatologists still had time on their hands, media personality and dermatologist, Dr. Julia Carroll was on hand to give tips on how to be a media maven. She provided an overview of how media relations and social media can build the profile of a practice.

Not to be outdone, Dr. Claudia Posso – who completed medical school and dermatology residency program in Columbia before moving to Canada in 2011 to complete a clinical fellowship in Pediatric Dermatology at the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto – shared her success story of overcoming residency challenges and becoming an accomplished dermatologist.

After Posso's story, it was time for Marsheila DeVan to retake the stage with her Communicating with Impact workshop. DeVan put many members in the hot seat and got them to get up in front of the room

and make small presentations using the skills she taught earlier in the day. DeVan stressed during this session that presenters must moderate the room by moving their eyes from person to person for each point; think of one thought, one look. She tossed the old notion of looking at one friendly face – as a public speaking lifeline – for the entire presentation out the window. Attendees learned the importance of working the room with their eyes, a technique employed by great orators such as Barack Obama and Martin Luther King.

After an action-packed day, and successfully getting through DeVan's communications workshop, it was time to wind up for the day. Dr. Afsaneh Alavi, Dr. Pearl Grimes and Wendy Adams from Galderma gave closing remarks using the presentation techniques imparted to us by DeVan.

As attendees left, there was a great deal of chatter about the success of the first Women in Dermatology Leadership meeting. In fact, many comments were floating around the room about needing to use DeVan's communication tips in all interactions, along with her presentation suggestion of one thought, one look, as well as using technology more to find more time; stepping up to change the system and mentoring other women. In fact, many were wondering when the next meeting will be? The good news is that the CDA and Women's Dermatologic Society are considering holding the Women in Dermatology Leadership meeting again in two years.

However, for those who cannot wait two years, there is a Women in Dermatology Reception event planned at the CDA Annual Conference in Montreal, featuring author, lawyer and entertaining and experienced TV and radio host, Sophie Berube. Berube will discuss the concepts of work, wealth, family, love and finding happiness in the everyday chaotic life. Join us for this exciting presentation at the CDA conference in Le Westin Montreal on Friday, June 23 at 6:15 p.m.

