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“Most of the professors were Men” - a qualitative study of female medical students’ perceptions of careers in academic medicine.

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Abstract -

Background: Women remain underrepresented in academic medicine, particularly at higher grades. A gender-based disparity in attitudes towards academic medicine has been described in qualified clinicians but not explored in student populations.

To explore the perspectives of female graduate entry medical (GEM) students with regards to future careers in academic medicine.

Method: A qualitative study using focus groups, facilitated by two female undergraduate medical students. A semi-structured topic guide was developed with a primary focus was on gender. However, the influence of intersecting characteristics was also explored.

Findings: Twenty-seven female students from years 2 to 4 of a single GEM school in the West Midlands participated in five focus groups (mean duration 47.2 mins; range 36-59 mins). Thematic analysis revealed seven themes: work-life balance, impact on clinical career progression, personal preferences, GEM specific concerns, role models, imposter syndrome, culture of academia. GEM-specific concerns of financial issues and the influence of previous experience were highlighted. The presence of imposter syndrome, rooted in a lack of knowledge about careers, lack of self-confidence and feelings of not belonging was an important recurrent theme.

Conclusions: Access to relevant and timely information, support, opportunities, and concordant mentors are essential requirements from the first year of medical school. Fear of discrimination and bias must be addressed across the academic journey. Future exploration of the impact of ethnicity, LGBTQ+ and disability on academic medicine careers is required.

Keywords – Female Medical Students, Male Professors, Careers in Medicine

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