Editorial

It’s time to stop calling our office staff “the girls”

“Please check out with the girls on your way out the door.” In years gone by, the prevailing culture of medical offices was such that it was commonplace for the physician to refer to office staff as “the girls”. Given the gender imbalance that is commonly seen among staff in offices and, to a lesser extent, in institutions, this behavior of calling the staff “girls” continues to this day. It is time to stop this behavior and eradicate the term from our professional vocabulary and from the workplace when referring to adult women.

Our office staff is the backbone of our practice, from the receptionist to the medical assistant, manager, and so on. Because patients often form impressions of us based on their interactions with the staff, professionalism is vital. Conversely, how patients treat our staff can have an impact on staff morale and turnover as well as the reputation of our practice. Every time an encounter is transformed into a caring moment or a meaningful interaction, we all win. By being mindful of the power and significance of word choice and how it affects our work environment, we can establish a respectful culture and advance our specialty.

Cultivating respect

If you feel that you use “girls” as a term of endearment or affection or use it to be informal, reconsider. Referring to a group of women as “girls” or “squad” or “peeps” may be part of the current lexicon, but it has no place in a professional workplace. Leadership styles and work environments vary, and certainly there is no “one size fits all.” Some offices may want to foster a more casual rather than formal or hierarchical environment. No matter your style, respect is the cornerstone of a well-functioning team. Studies have shown that factors such as trust, shared objectives, and a clear definition of roles affect teamwork (Jones and Jones, 2011; Rosen et al., 2018). High-functioning teams in turn lead to improved patient safety and outcomes, as well as better morale and decreased burnout (Garcia-Campayo et al., 2016; Rosen et al., 2018).

Cultural shifts

The Association of American Medical Colleges recently announced that for the first time, women composed the majority of enrolled U.S medical students (American Medical Colleges, 2019). The field of dermatology in particular continues to be a specialty composed heavily of women (Bae et al., 2016; Shinohara, 2019). Concurrent with these cultural shifts, it is imperative that we, both as individuals and as a specialty group, reexamine and update any gender-biased attitudes. No doubt, conscious and sustained efforts are required to change cultural norms. As one small step, let us all ensure that each member of our staff is treated as a respected professional who is integral to the success of the dermatologic team and the wellbeing of the patient.

Conflict of Interest

None.

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