Gender-specific health, a proposal for the future

It is with great pleasure that with this editorial we present the first issue of The Italian Journal of Gender-Specific Medicine, Italy's first and only “gender-specific” scientific journal.

The editorial project, which Il Pensiero Scientifico Editore worked on for almost a year, with the unconditional cooperation of Novartis, deals with the topic of gender-specific medicine and aims to contribute to the further development and spread of a culture of gender-specific medicine in our country.

Men and women are naturally different, and their brains evolve differently depending on their individual history. The inequalities between men and women are biological and social, health-related and cultural, ethical, religious, financial and even, in these times of Expo, dietary. Within this complex situation, gender has come to be recognised (2006, WHO) as one of the factors that determines health, a bridge between social and health-related aspects. A great many scientific studies have shown that being man or woman, male or female, conditions the onset and evolution of illnesses, diagnostic and therapeutic approaches, rehabilitation and healing.

A paradox has increasingly emerged over the past few decades: men gain years in health, whereas women gain years of disability. Does this depend on biological factors, social factors or both? And gender becomes the focal point of the debate, because in order to evaluate health inequalities, we cannot overlook “gender”, one of the key variables.

In Italy the gender-specific approach has yet to take off; a great deal is already being done, however this is not enough and for the time being we are lacking gender-specific healthcare, social, cultural and political strategies. And this is despite the fact that social inequalities are responsible for one third of all deaths in Europe alone. Promoting gender-specific research and implementing gender-specific policies means dealing with differences and inequalities and taking action to guarantee equity in terms of treatments and access to healthcare, and more besides, to men and women.

The Italian Journal of Gender-Specific Medicine is being established precisely to stimulate debate and favour the diffusion of the gender-specific culture through the involvement of the various stakeholders recognised as being able to fight inequality: doctors, interns and specialists, clinical and basic researchers, pharmacologists, decision-makers, payers, healthcare directors, economists and bioethicists, in order to share experiences and contacts with all those committed to promoting gender-specific medicine and building a network of professionals and interdisciplinary relationships that favour its uniform application.

The publication of the journal, which has an international scope and includes contributions in both Italian and English, was made possible by a scientific committee and an editorial board including key players in the healthcare, institutional, economic, bioethics and general culture fields.

Each issue will deal with at least three macro-areas:
• current affairs, with news, summaries, interviews with key players on the national and regional health scenario and updates on European, national and local regulations and social policies;
• from literature and from the world, summaries of contributions of special interest published in international journals, highlighting and reporting on events and congresses;
• reviews and original articles to which the central part of each publication is dedicated, for scientific updates, summaries of trials or observational research, subgroup analysis, narrative reviews or systematic reviews.

The first issue of the journal is introduced by an editorial by Giovannella Baggio of the University of Padua, taking a closer look at the history and evolution of gender-specific medicine, starting from the well-known editorial by Bernardine Patricia Healy published by the New England Journal of Medicine. Baggio examines the interdisciplinary dimension of gender-specific medicine, which studies the influence of sex and gender on human physiology, pathophysiology and pathology. All evidence-based medicine is undeniably based on studies conducted primarily in men, calling for the need to restudy illness in terms of gender. Baggio focuses on cardiovascular diseases, particularly myocardial infarction, which represents one of the fields of health most extensively explored in terms of gender and in which we hope for an application of gender-specific medicine in everyday clinical practice.

Flavia Franconi (University of Sassari) defines the terms “sex” and “gender” and their complex and continuous interactions, so that it is not always easy to distinguish one from the other. The differences begin to be detected, although women in clinical practice are still
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