

# The Italian Journal of Gender-Specific Medicine and the Italian Gender Medicine Network

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2018 marks the third year of publication of the *Italian Journal of Gender-Specific Medicine*. The journal is a collection of national and international works in the field of gender medicine and sociology. It became an essential tool to promote and sustain the network that has been formed in the last years on gender-specific medicine.

It arose from the alliance between three major institutions that made up the “initial core” of the network: the Reference Centre for Gender Medicine of the Italian National Institute of Health (Istituto Superiore di Sanità - ISS)<sup>1</sup>, the National Research Centre for Gender Medicine and Health<sup>2</sup>, and the Italian Group for Health and Gender (GISeG)<sup>3</sup>. These three structures have gathered around them numerous scientific societies, groups and centers, and have established links with several regions and universities.

Some extremely positive actions have been undertaken in recent years. First of all, there is the approval of the law of 11 January, 2018, which came into force with a provision of 15 February 2018, article 3<sup>4</sup>, which provides for the application and dissemination of gender medicine in the Italian National Health Service<sup>5,6</sup> and for which the Italian Ministry of Health, with the help of the ISS, is preparing the implementing decrees. The synergy described above has also contributed to the launch of various training and information activities, as well as projects, publications and tools for the dissemination of a culture, still so neglected, on gender differences that can be detected in all specialties of medicine. One example is the *Newsletter*, only in Italian at yet, published every three months, which gathers cultural and educational stimuli, events, news, bibliographic reviews and updates<sup>7</sup>.

Around this initial “core” there have been close links and collaborations with some very important Italian organizations in the field of science and education:

- the Giovanni Lorenzini Foundation (Milan and Houston), which has been involved in promoting gender-specific health since the 1980s;
- the FNOMCeO (Italian National Federation of the Orders of Doctors and Dentists), which has created a Commission dealing with gender medicine and has recently published on its website a distance learning (FAD) course for all doctors;

- SIMG (Italian Society of General Medicine and Primary Care) and FIMMG (Italian Federation of General Practitioners);
- FADOI (Italian Federation of the Associations of Hospital Internists), which has more than 2500 members;
- the many scientific societies (such as the Italian Society of Cardiology, the Italian Society of Pharmacology and Rheumatology, and the Italian Association of Medical Oncology), which have established working groups on gender differences. We have only mentioned a few of them, but there are many others;
- AIDM (Italian Medical Women’s Association), which has dedicated its training activities in recent years to gender-specific medicine.

There are also “lay” associations that support gender medicine, with many information and training activities and with financial contributions to young researchers. AMMI (Association of Italian Doctors’ Wives) should be mentioned first, as should Soroptimist and FIDAPA BPW (Italian Federation of Business and Professional Women).

The activity of this network and the availability of the people who are part of it has led to the proliferation of training conferences in Italy and to the creation of many centers dedicated to gender medicine, sometimes within universities, such as in Ferrara, sometimes within doctors’ associations, as in Rimini, sometimes founded by experts, as in Bolzano.

In addition, the decision of the Permanent Conference of Presidents of the Italian Medical Schools to publish a document in which all schools of medicine are encouraged to change their teaching method, ensuring that all medical specialties could contain an academic activity dedicated to gender differences, appears as extremely important.

Finally, the Italian Regions: many have created an awareness network for all the Health Authorities, others are in the organizational phase and the law of 11 January 2018<sup>4</sup> will help them a great deal. A round table discussion among the Regions was held at the 4<sup>th</sup> National Congress on Gender Medicine in Padua (November 2017), whose proceedings were published in the *IJGSM*<sup>8</sup>.

Moreover, for the first time at the Padua Congress, the Scientific Societies of Cardiology, Oncology, Neurology and Geriatrics discussed the national system of guidelines<sup>9</sup>, to be institutionalized on the basis of a recent law that advocates their standardization to provide for the inclusion of gender differences within them. If this project goes ahead, Italy would be the first Country in the world including gender-specific differences in the guidelines for medical practice.

The Italian network is also connected to the International Society of Gender Medicine<sup>10</sup>, founded in 2006, in which the following countries are represented: Germany, Austria, Italy, the Netherlands, Sweden, Israel, Japan, Canada and the USA. Of notice, also thanks to these networking activities, several calls for research projects dealing with gender disparity in biology and medicine have been proposed and funded either in Italy (e.g. by the Italian Drug Agency, i.e. AIFA) or by the European Union (e.g. Gender-Net).

The *Italian Journal of Gender-Specific Medicine* has contributed decisively to supporting the cultural importance of this Italian network and stimulating experimental and clinical research activities, both biomedical and social. The editors are working to ensure that the Journal could contribute to further stimulate the debate among all

stakeholders, also opening up to social, ethical and economic issues.

Finally, the *Italian Journal of Gender-Specific Medicine* is now supported by many foreign researchers and the next important commitment will be to strengthen the development of an international network as inclusive as possible.

## References

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