

## Gender-specific medicine watch

News from the literature, news, tools and resources

### The National Study Centre on Health and Gender Medicine

#### Giovanella Baggio

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The Centro Studi Nazionale su Salute e Medicina di Genere (National Study Centre on Health and Gender Medicine) started its activity in 2009, when it was founded as a result of a fortunate convergence of interests by some and professionals from Padua and Milan together with the Giovanni Lorenzini Medical Science Foundation (Milan-Houston) and the Padua University Hospital, where its headquarters are based according to its bylaws. The aim was to launch, disseminate, deepen and above all encourage research and knowledge in the field of gender differences in medicine. Despite the exceptional progress in medical research in recent decades, there had been a total lack of attention to this dimension

until then. Gender medicine is not the study of diseases that are prevalent in men or women, but the study of differences in all diseases that affect both women and men and that may have differences in pathogenetic mechanisms, diagnostics, symptoms, clinical course, and response to therapy. Likewise, it should not be forgotten that prevention, including risk assessment, should also be carried out from a gender-specific perspective.

With this objective in mind, in almost ten years of activity, the Study Centre has engaged many Italian people and realities committed to fostering the growth of sensitivity and knowledge on gender medicine through conferences, participation in dedicated sessions of the various scientific societies, meetings with political and social decision-makers, participation in the growth of gender medicine in the different Regions, and networking with all realities, for example universities, and national and international associa-



tions dedicated to the development and application of this dimension of medicine.

Many national conferences have been held, taking stock of the progress made by gender medicine in Italy. The first was held in 2009, paving the way for this dimension of medicine; the following instead started to create a network, an exchange of experiences and knowledge and important collaborations. In these years, conferences have been held every two years. In 2011, the first Italian conference on gender oncology was also held. To date, it continues to be a unique event in its kind, also at international level.

The Study Centre is also the Italian society recognized by the International Society of Gender Medicine and acts as a bridge between Italian realities and the international community.

One of the most valuable results of this work has been the development of an Italian network of gender medicine: the Centre of Referral of the Italian National Institute of Health, the Gruppo Italiano Salute e Genere (GISeG) - Italian Health and Gender Group - and the Centro Studi su Salute e Medicina di Genere - Study Centre on Health and Gender Medicine - are the pillars around which very important realities have been connected, such as the Federazione Nazionale degli Ordini dei Medici Chirurghi e degli Odontoiatri (FNOMCeO) - Italian National Federation of Medical and Orthodontic Associations -, the Federazione delle Associazioni dei Dirigenti Ospedalieri Internisti (FADOI) - Italian Federation of Internal Medi-

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cine Clinical Directors, the Società Italiana di Medicina Generale e delle Cure Primarie (SIMG) - Italian Society of Primary Health Care-, the Società Italiana di Reumatologia (SIR) - Italian Rheumatology Society-, the Associazione Italiana Donne Medico (AIDM) - Italian Association of Women Physicians - and many scientific societies. The contribution and coordination provided by the healthcare system in some Regions and with universities have also been significant. Today, in teaching medicine, the gender dimension is presented not as a separate subject, but as a facet to be developed in each subject of the curriculum.

This alliance has made Italy the European country where there is certainly more sensitivity, information and training on gender medicine.

In recent years we have also worked to raise awareness on the fact that gender medicine is not a branch of medicine in itself but a dimension that must pervade all branches of medical knowledge. That is why we want to move from a concept of gender medicine to that of generic-specific medicine, and this was the focus of the Conference in November 2017.

Finally, it should be remembered that, precisely because of the sensitivity promoted by the Study Centre on Health and Gender Medicine, in 2012 the Department of Molecular Medicine of the University of Padua founded the Chair of Gender Medicine, the first and only in Italy, which I am honoured to hold. This means that in recent years at the University of Padua there has been a dedicated course for students. This course has drawn the attention of the teaching staff at Medical School, who have alternated in teaching at numerous seminars, and who have then transferred gender differences as an absolutely essential dimension in teaching their specialties.

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## FADOI and Gender Medicine

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The *Federazione delle Associazioni dei Dirigenti Ospedalieri Internisti* (FADOI) - Italian Federation of the Associations of Internist Hospital Managers - is the Italian scientific society in hospital internal medicine. In 2008, the first article "Medicina di genere, i progressi ed i problemi ancora da risolvere"<sup>1</sup> (Gender medicine, progress and problems yet to be solved), written with the then national president Antonino Mazzone and published in *Doctor*, marked the official beginning of FADOI's activity in this new dimension of medicine and interest has continued to grow since then. Already in 2011, in Florence, at the National Conference, with the newly established Gender Medicine Area, FADOI hosted the first meeting of scientific societies on this subject. For the first time, representatives of the main Italian scientific societies with an interest in gender medicine, the Italian National Institute of Health, the technical body of the Ministry of Health, and Giovannella Baggio, holder of the only chair in gender medicine in Italy at the University of Padua, sat at the same table to share and promote this "different" cultural approach.

In recent years, the scientific society FADOI has been deeply committed to spreading a gender culture among its members by planning training and research activities that have involved above all the younger members of the society.

FADOI's Gender Medicine Area includes physicians who have obtained a master's degree in gender medicine and a group made up of young internists from all regions of Italy, coordinated by the past president of FADOI Youth. This group has developed in the last four years

a concrete interest in gender-specific differences in all fields of internal medicine.

Since 2012, gender medicine has become a hot topic of the FADOI National Conference. In fact, five courses and two symposia have been held on gender medicine in recent years. After the first courses with lectures by national experts, a large number of FADOI representatives have been involved, presenting reports on gender differences in the various internal pathologies in which they are experts. In recent years, FADOI juniors (speakers) have also had the opportunity to measure up with seniors (discussants) on fundamental issues such as gender differences in the cardiovascular, respiratory, gastroenterological, metabolic and haematological fields, thus setting in motion a real process of literacy among hospital internists. An increasing number of gender medicine symposia or lectures have been included in the programme of regional conferences. FADOI also intends to include, from 2019, a report on gender medicine in monothematic courses and national symposia. Thanks to the junior group, FADOI's scientific work in this area has intensified. Numerous abstracts dedicated to gender medicine have been presented at the National Conference in recent years; the most deserving have been granted oral presentation and sponsorship of the speaker at the National Conference. At the same time, in the *Italian Journal of Medicine* many articles by the Gender Medicine Group have been published, considering the stratification of data by gender, i.e., with differentiated statistical revision, of important FADOI clinical trials<sup>2-4</sup>.

### *FADOI builds networks: training and informing*

As far as training activities are concerned, at the 2nd Level Master's Course in Gender Medicine of the University of Florence, where FADOI members participate as lecturers, the Federation has sponsored the enrolment of young members of the Gen-