

March 8, 2017

Re: "Breaking Down Barriers in Vascular Surgery" by Amber Bemis
in *Northwestern Medicine*, Winter 2016-17, Volume 04, Number 01

Dear Ms. Bemis:

Your article in *Northwestern Medicine* about Melina Kibbe, "Breaking Down Barriers in Vascular Surgery," is a complete description of her continuing academic achievements and influence and is much appreciated by all members of the Division of Vascular Surgery, Department of Surgery, Feinberg School of Medicine. In fact, a more appropriate title for the article might have been "Trailblazing in Vascular Surgery." While there is undoubtedly a gender gap in surgery, the connotation of the actual title, "Breaking Down Barriers in Vascular Surgery," and the first paragraph of the article fail to recognize the dedication of the Division of Vascular Surgery at Northwestern University to advocate for gender equity. I would like to point out these aspects of our history for your readership.

The Division of Vascular Surgery at Northwestern University was the first in the United States to admit a female surgical resident to the vascular surgery fellowship program, just two years after the program started. The ACGME-approved vascular surgery training program was initiated in 1974, one year after I joined Dr. John Bergan, the founder of the Division of Vascular Surgery, in practice. We were the 11th vascular surgery program to be approved by ACGME. Our mission is to train academic surgeons regardless of their sex, race, religion, or country of origin. We have had fellows and visiting fellows from many countries, including France, Mexico, Ireland, Australia, Japan, Korea, Hong Kong, Brazil, and Israel.

Dr. Marian McNamara completed her general surgery residency training and was admitted to our program in 1976; she completed the fellowship in 1977. Since then, we have had 12 female fellows in the program who have gone on to distinguished careers. Dr. Linda Graham, who completed the fellowship in 1981-82, accepted a faculty position at University of Michigan and later was elected to President of the Society of University Surgeons, a most respected academic surgical society.

Along with John Bergan and more recently William Pearce, we have built an excellent vascular surgery training program. We were the first to establish the non-invasive vascular laboratory as a new diagnostic service of the hospital. We also were the first to develop vascular nursing to provide better care to patients. Both the vascular laboratory and vascular nursing eventually were accepted nationally as standard


vascular practice and national organizations focusing on these areas were formed (the Society for Non-invasive Technology and the Society for Vascular Nursing). The Northwestern Vascular Symposium, which was started in 1976, has become a premier post-graduate education program. The unique feature of the Symposium is a printed book that contains all presentations and is available to participants at the meeting. The book is edited by the Chief of the Division of Vascular Surgery and contains 40 to 45 chapters. We celebrated the 40th anniversary of the symposium in 2015.

The Division is proud to have produced many leaders of vascular surgery. Table I shows the former fellows who have served as president of national and regional surgical societies. In addition, several international trainees have served as president of their country's surgical societies (John Harris of Australia, Jean-Baptiste Ricco of France, Bonno Van Bellen of Brazil, and Jang Sang Park of Korea. Many fellows have served on the editorial board of major surgical journals, including *Journal of Vascular Surgery*.

I worked along with Dr. John Bergan to establish the Division of Vascular Surgery at Northwestern and am a former Chief of the Division. I can say with assurance that there are no gender barriers in the Division of Vascular Surgery. Over the 43-year history of the Division, more than 15% (13 of 83) of our fellows have been females, a respectable percentage. During the past 10 years, that percentage has been 26% (6 of 23).

This in no way is intended to take away from the achievements of Melina Kibbe. We in the Division of Vascular Surgery are proud of her accomplishments, which are the result of her hard work and intelligence and have nothing to do with gender barriers.

Sincerely,



James S. T. Yao, M.D., Ph.D.
Emeritus Professor of Surgery

Table I: Northwestern Vascular Surgery Fellows who have served as president of national or regional societies.

Society	Year of Service	Fellow
National Vascular Surgical Societies		
American Association for Vascular Surgery	2002	William Pearce
American Venous Forum	2007	Michael Dalsing
Society of University Surgeons	1994	Linda Graham
Regional Vascular Surgical Societies		
Mid-Western Vascular Surgical Society	1993	William Flinn
	1999	Walter Whitehouse (visiting fellow)
	2002	Timothy Baxter
	2005	Michael Dalsing
	2006	Walter McCarthy
	2017	Melina Kibbe
Southern Association for Vascular Surgery	1991	Richard Dean
Eastern Surgical Society	2007	William Flinn
	2014	Marshall Benjamin