

Women in Thoracic Surgery

*A Brief History
1986-2010*

by

*Dr. Nora Burgess
Historian*

In compiling this history, every effort has been made to include as many of the individuals involved with WTS leadership throughout the years. If you have served in a leadership capacity but do not see your name mentioned, please let us know so we can update our records.

Then:

*“We do not have any women going through our
residency program at ...*

*From the beginning of our residency program some
fifteen years ago, we have not had a suitable
applicant.*

*While there are a few female cardiac surgeons in this
country, none have distinguished themselves recently.*

I appreciate your interest in the fair sex.”¹

&

Now:

*200 Women certified by the American Board of
Thoracic Surgery*

¹ Personal Correspondence, October 1985 to L. Kohman, MD

Mission
Women in Thoracic Surgery

The mission of Women in Thoracic Surgery is to further the achievements of women practicing thoracic surgery by providing mutual support and facilitating professional advancement.

Goals of Its Membership

Provide quality care to our patients

Mentor young women interested in pursuing careers in thoracic and cardiac surgery

Provide educational opportunities for our members

Educate the public, especially women, regarding cardiac and pulmonary health and disease

As a cardiothoracic surgeon who happens to be a woman, it is always a special pleasure to meet other young surgical colleagues of the same distinction. Not too long ago, networking success usually depended upon badge reconnaissance at the national meetings using registration color codes. If the color was neither that of an exhibitor nor an allied professional, a surgeon would introduce herself and relish the new friendship that so often developed. Given that there were only 10 women in 1980 with ABTS certificates, this screening method did not require too many introductions.

Several young such surgeons applied this approach enthusiastically and one, Dr. Leslie Kohman, took it one step further. She invited any women surgeons she encountered to informal breakfast meetings at The Society of Thoracic Surgeons and American Association for Thoracic Surgery meetings. These kindred souls met every year to hear news, socialize, and network – especially important given the barriers of distance and their training/practice commitments. The success of these discussions led Dr. Kohman to establish regular, semi-annual breakfast/luncheon meetings of a nascent organization that later became Women in Thoracic Surgery.

In 1988, the first Women in Cardiothoracic Surgery newsletter was sent to 30 women surgeons building on the concept of a women's professional group of cardiothoracic surgeons interested in career development – as surgeons – as well as camaraderie. This new sense of focus encouraged the group to renew and expand efforts to engage potential members in the nascent organization across the continuum of training, medical school to post graduate sub-specialization.

Goals were set to promote networking and access to information about residencies, faculty positions, research and clinical opportunities, and to interact with other groups of professional women.

As the 1980s closed, Women in Cardiothoracic Surgery had 84 members and an increasing level of participation among residents interested in training in the field as well as practicing in other countries, including Australia, Bulgaria, Canada, China, France, India, Germany, and Sweden.

By 1991 there were 20 women members of STS, and there were four members of the AATS. As WTS members became active in society committees established numerous successful careers across private practice and academic settings, the Women in Cardiothoracic Surgery Newsletter content expanded to include not only notes on personal professional advancements but information on publications, grant writing, and forum discussions. These were supplemented by membership mentoring on society committee participation, medical treatment of women with cardiovascular/thoracic diseases, the international practice of thoracic surgery, thoracic oncology research, and residency directorships.

In 1994, 15 members were in academic practice, 8 in private, 5 in multi-specialty groups, 4 solo, and 3 single specialty group practices. Six members had 5 years or less in practice, 16 6-10 years, and 9 more than 10 years in clinical practice. Five members performed thoracic surgery exclusively, 9 cardiac surgery exclusively, 11 predominantly cardiac surgery, and 3 performed some vascular surgery as well.

In the spring of 1994 issue, the Women in Cardiothoracic Surgery newsletter distributed under the banner title the *Oracle* broke the 100 mark for the first time at a circulation of 118 names.

Over the next 5 years the society matured, being renamed Women in Thoracic Surgery to reflect recent agreements with STS and AATS. A formal directory of the members with contact information was created, a publication schedule of the *Oracle* was formalized, by-laws were developed, and the society was formally incorporated as well.

Professional advancement and leadership development opportunities abounded in the late 1990's for WTS members. By 1997 more than a dozen WTS members were active participant members of STS committees, a new high watermark of the mentoring and advancement efforts by all of its members. WTS developed, with corporate sponsors, grants for members to attend academic career professional development courses including those at the Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University.

Early in 2000, the result of much hard work by many members of the society, WTS and STS jointly produced The Women in Thoracic Surgery Symposium to mark the society's 15th anniversary. This event celebrated the achievements of the 108 women who to date had become boarded by the American Board of Thoracic Surgery. More than 300 people attended and its content was published as a supplement to *The Annals of Thoracic Surgery* in February 2001. Surgeons initiated as honorary surgeon members initiated were Drs. Eugene Braunwald, Delos Cosgrove III, Nicholas Kouchoukos, F. Griffith Pearson, Gerald Ranier, and Robert Repogle.

In November 2003 outreach, professional advancement, and networking goals were refined at a Women in Thoracic Surgery Strategic Planning Retreat and out of this session detailed roadmaps for long term, sustained focus in enhancing the WTS website and recruitment of new members were developed. A fully envisioned mentoring program was initiated to include online links to mentors within WTS.

The WTS Scholarship program, the first of its type to promote the field of cardiothoracic surgery to residents and students as they make choices future specialty training, started in a 2004. An essay contest was organized and winners were funded to attend the STS Annual Meeting. Over the next 6 years the WTS Scholarship program has now funded 33 women, and awarded over \$37,000, to welcome the next generations into a robust, informal network/career resource for members and soon-to-be members alike.

With 42 out of 340 trainees in U.S. cardiothoracic surgery residencies being women by 2004, WTS membership was offered to all women residents and medical students interested in the field. A resident/mentorship page was added to the WTS website offering lists of mentors and the WTS website provided links to mentorship resources as well as the names of WTS members interested in mentoring.

In 2008 the WTS Bylaws were updated to welcome supporters from all professional backgrounds and affiliations. New membership "Candidate" and "Associate" categories were established to that end, membership brochures were developed to promote recruitment of new members and a greater level of engagement with upcoming generations of women surgeons.

WTS expanded partnership with other organizations in 2009 and 2010, joining the Joint Council of Thoracic Surgery Education, Inc., Best and the Brightest Subcommittee to promote recruitment of young physicians in the fields of cardiac and thoracic surgery.

Currently, WTS has 214 Active Members in the United States, 44 Active Members internationally, 93 Candidate Members, and 3 Emeritus for a total of 360 Members overall. Their professional lives are as varied as their talents, encompassing work in all practice settings and in a myriad of countries. Among them, 54 practice adult cardiac surgery exclusively, 51 practice general thoracic surgery exclusively, 32 members practice both cardiac and thoracic surgery, and 27 members concentrate their practice on congenital heart surgery. At least 75 women described their practice setting as academic.

Women in Thoracic Surgery Leadership

1986-1988

President

Leslie Kohman

Newsletter Editor

Sharon Bogarty

1989-1991

President

Leslie Kohman

Vice President

Shauna Roberts

Treasurer or Secretary/Treasurer

Nora Burgess

Newsletter Editor

Phyllis Edwards/Darlene Goldstein

1992-1995

President

Phyllis Edwards

Treasurer or Secretary/Treasurer

Patricia McCormack

Newsletter Editor

Altagracia Chavez/Mary Mancini

1996-1998

President

Jemi Olak

Vice President

Mercedes Dullum

Treasurer or Secretary/Treasurer

Patricia McCormack/Carolyn Reed

Newsletter Editor

Mary Mancini/Anne Billingsly

1999-2000

President
Rosalyn Scott
Vice President
Constance Haan
Treasurer or Secretary/Treasurer
Constance Haan
Newsletter Editor

2001-2002

President
AJ Carpenter
Vice President
Carolyn Dresler
Treasurer or Secretary/Treasurer
Lorraine Rubis
Newsletter Editor
Mary Boylan

2003-2004

President
Mercedes Dullum
Vice President
Carolyn Dresler/Margarita Camacho
Treasurer or Secretary/Treasurer
Lorraine Rubis
Newsletter Editor
Mary Boylan
Website Editor
Shauna Roberts

2005-2007

President
Margarita Camacho
Vice President
Cynthia Herrington
Treasurer or Secretary/Treasurer
Rebecca Wolfer
Newsletter Editor
Kathleen Fenton
Website Editor
Shauna Roberts/Virginia Litle

2008-2010

President
Nora Burgess
Vice President
Yolonda Colson
Treasurer or Secretary/Treasurer

Jessica Donington
Newsletter Editor
Kathleen Fenton
Website Editor
Virginia Litle

2010-2011

President
Yolonda Colson
Vice President
Virginia Litle
Treasurer or Secretary/Treasurer
Jessica Donington
Newsletter Editor
Kathleen Fenton
Website Editor
Virginia Litle

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Women in Thoracic Surgery Scholarship Winners

[By the year of the meeting at which the awards were made]

2005 Meeting

Jeanne Cleveland
Tammy Baxter
Betty Tong
Tiffany Anthony
Farah Rahman
Yvonne Carter
Dawn Jaroszewski
Lidia Libretti

2006 Meeting

Karen Gersch
Katie Nason
Rose Ganim
Cherie Parungo

2007 Meeting

Gurjyot Bajwa
Reshma Biniwale
Monica Casiraghi
Jaime Lewis
Vanessa Olbrecht

2008 Meeting

Elizabeth Thomas
Lina Vargas
Yishay Orr
Patricia Rodriguez
Siobain Margaret Horan
Jasmine Huang

2009 Meeting

Sonam Shah
Elizabeth David
Elizabeth FitzSullivan
Lana Schumacher

2010 Meeting

Lindsay Saint
Sarah Billmeier
Meghana Kunkala
Helenmari Merritt
Candice Lee