

# *A Short History* of the **American Association of Women Emergency Physicians**

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## **The American Association of Women Emergency Physicians (AAWEP)**

was established in 1985 as a 501(c)3 organization. Fifteen years and 117 members later, AAWEP joined the American College of Emergency Physicians (ACEP), where it remains recognized as an official section of the College. By 2005, the organization had grown to 265 members, and by September 2015, membership had exploded to 625! The enormous value of AAWEP is directly associated with its growth, and it is rapidly progressing to become one of ACEP's largest sections.

## **A NEW PARTNERSHIP WITH ACEP**

AAWEP's inaugural Chair, Dr. Diana Fite, describes the creation of the section as bittersweet. Its national parent organization, the *American Association of Women Emergency Physicians* (which began as *Women Emergency Physicians*), was so successful that some members failed to see the need for a stand-alone organization. Ironically, the more successful (and busier) the early members became, the less time they had to devote to a national endeavor.

When individual volunteers became incapable of providing the time needed to maintain the organization, they were forced to hire an executive director and cover the additional costs associated with such an expansion. The expenses of running a stand-alone organization eventually became prohibitive so a request was made to bring AAWEP into the ACEP fold, where it was welcomed with open arms. ACEP board members recognized that the new partnership would enable AAWEP to fully concentrate on its mission, and were kind enough to let the new section keep its name, which reflected its roots as a national organization.

## **FULFILLING A NEED**

AAWEP's value to emergency medicine is now being understood in new ways. Despite the particulars of each physician's path, it is universally true that having a "village" helps women advance in their careers. Women comprise half of the talent pool from which emergency medicine must find the next generation of physicians. AAWEP helps *all* ACEP members create systems that can recruit and retain women in the specialty.

Many women do not fully recognize the value of AAWEP until life becomes complicated. They need to work more closely with male colleagues, for example, and have hit a wall; or they decide to start a family and are faced with an employer that does not easily accommodate pregnancy and its complications; or they are passed over for a leadership position or raise they well deserve. AAWEP can provide a lifeline of support when faced with difficult situations like these.

## **AAWEP'S OVERARCHING OBJECTIVES**

- To promote the professional advancement and leadership skills of female emergency physicians
- To promote mentoring opportunities and mutual support for female emergency physicians, including providing positive role models for medical students
- To provide an opportunity for female emergency physicians to meet, interact, and network with each other and with supportive male members
- To develop and present educational programs that may be of particular importance or pertinence to female emergency physicians
- To prepare and distribute an interesting, educational, and informative newsletter for members of the section at a minimum of every six months
- To serve as a resource to the College president, Board of Directors, College committees and ACEP members on issues relating to female emergency physicians
- To develop a roster of public relations and legislative expertise of female emergency physicians
- To provide a pathway for professional leadership development within the organization

AAWEP has amassed a long list of stellar leaders in its 30-year history, including the following Chairs:

**Diana Fite, MD, FACEP** (Oct 1998–Oct 2005)

**Lily C. Conrad, MD, PhD, FACEP** (Nov 2005–Oct 2007)

**Kathryn Hall-Boyer, MD, FACEP** (Nov 2007–Oct 2009)

**Hortencia Luna-Gonzales, MD, FACEP** (Nov 2009–Oct 2011)

**Kerry B. Broderick, MD, FACEP** (Nov 2011–Oct 2013)

**Kathleen Clem, MD, FACEP** (Nov 2013–Oct 2015)

**Mary Westergaard, MD, FACEP** (Chair-Elect, Nov 2015–Oct 2017)