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AMWA Shirt Editorial

Elinor Pisano

Sometimes I wonder, even in this day and age, how far women have come in medicine. The fact is that women continue to make progress in equalizing the numbers of male and female students, residents, and faculty. The Women in U.S. Academic Medicine and Medical School Benchmarking Report shows a wonderful trend in the numbers of women that are being accepted into medical school, and subsequently becoming successful in their medical careers.

Ultimately, though, I worry that it is our own conceptions of femininity and strength that still need changing. I am referring in particular to the recent fund-raising t-shirt put out by AMWA, which featured a silhouette in a “pin-up” style pose pouring over a book, with the slogan “Let’s play doctor.”

Now, let me be entirely clear. I am not a humorless, militant feminist. I can appreciate the humor of the statement. I realize that AMWA’s tradition is to use the sale of t-shirts with witty sexual innuendo because they undoubtedly sell, and raise funds—as a fundraiser should. If it had been the Pediatrics club t-shirt, I would have found it amusing, and I probably would have bought one. However, one cannot ignore the patent irony of a women’s advocacy group selling a shirt that says “Let’s play doctor.” The implicit sexual nature of the comment combined with the insinuation that women simply “play” doctor—much as one might play a naughty nurse for bedroom fun—is insulting.

Nor am I being a prude. Sexuality is a very powerful thing. It is as much a part of all of us as it is a part of our profession. We have to ask our patients difficult questions about sexuality and I think that comfort with sexual humor is tremendously important as we move forward with our careers.

However, as a woman, I would hope that what got me into this school was my intellect, rather than my sexuality. I would hope that is the case for each and every woman in this school! Intellect, rather than sexuality, should give us power; intellect is what will help us to move forward as we try to eradicate gender inequities in medicine.

