



CPD Whilst You Wee

Women in Medicine

Link to International Women's Day, 8th March 2026 →



Women in Medicine – Past, Present and Future

Women were formally barred from becoming doctors in the UK until the Medical Act of 1876, meaning acute hospital medicine was an exclusively male profession.

World War I and II created the first major opportunities for women to practise in acute hospital settings, managing trauma, infection and critical illness.

Today, women make up over 50% of UK medical graduates and acute medicine trainees, yet are still under-represented at consultant, leadership and national guideline level. Women earn on average 20–25% less than male doctors over a lifetime career, even after adjusting for hours worked and specialty.

In 2026, acute medicine is increasingly delivered by a predominantly female workforce. Systems, rotas and leadership structures are slowly beginning to move away from a historically male-designed workplace. These small changes will shape the future of medicine for women.

Spotlight on Pain Control

Women have a higher prevalence of chronic pain conditions, for example migraine, fibromyalgia and autoimmune-related pain.

Despite this, women are more likely to have pain **minimised or treated with sedatives rather than analgesia**. Women are more likely to wait longer for analgesia than their male equivalents.

Spotlight on Cardiovascular Disease

Women are **up to 50% more likely** than men to be initially misdiagnosed during an acute myocardial infarction.

Women under 55 have a **higher in-hospital mortality** following MI compared with age-matched men.

Up to **one-third of women** with MI present without chest pain. Women commonly present with breathlessness, nausea and vomiting, fatigue, back, jaw or epigastric pain.



Spotlight on Autoimmune Disease

Approximately **80% of autoimmune disease patients are female**.

Women often experience longer diagnostic delays due to fluctuating symptoms and non-specific early presentations such as rash, fatigue, joint pain.



Elizabeth Garrett Anderson (1836–1917), the first woman to qualify as a doctor in the UK.



Link to GMC – Women in Medicine