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New Study Reveals Women, Minority Hepatologists Face Workplace Discrimination, Unequal Pay and Lack of Promotion Opportunities

ALEXANDRIA, Va. – A new study has found that hepatologists in the U.S., particularly women and racial and ethnic minorities, commonly experience workplace discrimination, such as exclusion from decision-making, disrespectful treatment by other staff members and unequal pay, benefits and promotion opportunities. The study will be presented this week at [The Liver Meeting Digital Experience®](#) held by the [American Association for the Study of Liver Diseases \(AASLD\)](#).

"Our study identified pervasive barriers to workforce equity, including bias and discrimination," said Lauren Feld, MD, a gastroenterology/transplant hepatology fellow at the University of Washington School of Medicine who co-authored the study. "Unfortunately, work to reduce these barriers has become even more urgent during the COVID-19 pandemic, which has led to increased challenges for the health care workforce disproportionately shouldered by parts of our community. I hope this data helps fuel meaningful interventions to reduce bias and recruit, promote and retain women and physicians from underrepresented ethnicities."

For this cross-sectional study, researchers distributed a voluntary, anonymous online survey to 199 AASLD members in the U.S. The survey's 33 questions asked about respondents' experiences with workplace discrimination, including any perceived workplace discrimination by race, ethnicity or gender. Of the 199 respondents, 130 were women and 69 were men.

Among the survey respondents:

- 75 percent of women and 37 percent of men reported workplace discrimination.
- Twice as many women than men said they're not included in administrative decision-making.
- More than 40.3 percent of women and 7.5 percent of men reported experiencing disrespectful treatment from nursing or support staff.
- 39.5 percent of women and 13.4 percent of men reported receiving unequal pay.
- 24.8 percent of women and 4.5 percent of men said they were held to higher standards of performance than their peers.
- 17 percent of women and 10 percent of men reported they were not fairly considered for promotions or senior management positions.
- Two people reported experiencing sexual harassment in their workplace.

Based on survey respondents' self-identification, 120 were white, 53 were Asian American or Pacific Islander, 11 were Hispanic or Latinx, nine were Black or African American and one was Native American or Alaska Native. Women who identified as Black or Hispanic reported workplace discrimination, such as unequal pay or benefits and unfair consideration for promotions, more frequently than their white colleagues.

The study's authors concluded that effective and systematic changes are necessary to address and reduce disparities based on race, ethnicity and gender in the hepatology workforce.

"Identifying barriers to workforce equity is the first step toward eliminating them," Feld said. "In order to have the highest-quality workforce possible, we need to ensure that people are not being systematically disadvantaged from entry into the profession or retention and promotion. A representative workforce is essential for patient care in numerous quantifiable and unquantifiable ways."

Dr. Feld's poster entitled "Perceived Racial/Ethnic and Sex-Based Bias Among United States Hepatologists: A National Survey" (658) can be viewed at The Liver Meeting Digital Experience™. The corresponding abstract can be found in the journal [HEPATOLOGY](#).

About the AASLD

AASLD is the leading organization of clinicians and researchers committed to preventing and curing liver disease. The work of our members has laid the foundation for the development of drugs used to treat patients with viral hepatitis. Access to care and support of liver disease research are at the center of AASLD's advocacy efforts.

News releases and additional information about AASLD are available online at www.aasld.org.