



Women's Health Foundation (WHF) Recommendations for the NIH Transition Team

Women's Health Foundation (WHF) provides life strategies, community-based programs and services, and events to encourage women to optimize their pelvic health and wellness. WHF collaborates with leading NIH researchers to develop research initiatives in the field of women's pelvic health and fitness and is dedicated to becoming the nation's most visible and passionate champion of women's pelvic wellness issues.

Our recommendations for the NIH Transition team are as follows.

Establish an OB/GYN Institute Within NIH

Currently research in women's pelvic health (urogynecology) is funded through the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) or the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK). Given the expanse of other issues funded by these two institutes, women's pelvic disorders receives a disproportionately low portion of total research dollars when compared to the numbers of women with pelvic health disorders (includes sexual dysfunction, incontinence, prolapse, fibroids, menorrhagia, pelvic pain, or bowel function). We would encourage the incoming NIH director to consider making the Office of Women's Health an Institute with a full research agenda, or establishing an Institute of Obstetrics & Gynecology within the NIH.

FACT: The annual direct costs of UI are greater than the annual direct costs for breast, ovarian, cervical and uterine cancers combined. (Kirschstein, Ruth. (Feb. 2000). *Disease-Specific Estimates of Direct and Indirect Costs of Illness and NIH Support*. <http://osspp.od.nih.gov/ecostudies/COIreportweb.htm>)

Overall Expansion of Research Dollars for Pelvic Disorders

As the aforementioned fact alludes, the direct and indirect costs associated with pelvic health disorders are staggering. No matter which condition you assess, the numbers of sufferers is also staggering – 20 – 30 million women with urinary incontinence alone; 5 million+ women with fecal incontinence; 1:4 women with sexual dysfunction, and so on.

The current NIH funding for all urological conditions, which excludes sexual dysfunction, bowel disorders and gynecologic issues, was \$526 million in 2007, down steadily from 2004 and projected to be slightly less for 2008 & 2009. This in spite of an aging population and growing number of patients in the urogynecologic and urologic practices.

Additionally, while pelvic disorders do not typically kill you, they can, quite simply ruin your life. Excessive bleeding chronic pelvic pain or constant leakage of urine will interfere with normal activities, let alone exercise or other rigorous activities. Research shows that women with incontinence exercise less and have a higher rate of depression



than their continent peers. Conversely, research shows that obese women with symptoms of incontinence show improvement in symptoms as a direct correlation of weight loss. This suggests a compelling need to fund research in co-morbidities like obesity or aging and pelvic health or urinary incontinence.

Develop Public Health Campaign with CDC

The majority of women in America have limited knowledge of basic pelvic health. Starting with young women planning pregnancy and new mothers, we have an opportunity to prevent or vastly mitigate pelvic floor damage with simple health messages. The CDC, in conjunction with the Office of Women's Health is the logical body to develop and disseminate this campaign.

Women's Health Foundation would be pleased to work with the NIH and the Obama Transition team to further advances in women's pelvic health, outreach and research.

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