

NIH celebrates equity, diversity, and inclusion

By Kelly Lenox

In what officials promise is much more than a name change, NIH celebrated the new Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) with a full schedule of activities March 24-27 (see [text box](#)) that included a special flash mentoring session at NIEHS.

Although most of the events were webcast to Research Triangle Park (RTP), N.C. from the NIH campus in Bethesda, Md., NIEHS employees came together to share the celebration kickoff March 24 in Rodbell Auditorium and view the EDI Summit Opening Plenary. As part of the "NIH Women's Symposium 2014 - Looking Back, Moving Forward," they returned to Rodbell Auditorium on Mar. 26 for a videocast of the Women's symposium, and then the "Flash Mentoring Session for NIEHS Scientific and Administrative Staff with Senior Leadership," organized by an NIEHS planning committee chaired by Joan Pakenham, Ph.D.

Underscoring the NIH commitment to EDI

For the past year and a half, beginning with the appointment of Director Debra Chew in 2012, the NIH Office of Equal Opportunity and Diversity Management (OEODM) has been evolving into the new NIH Office of EDI. The strong NIH commitment to excellence in the principles of EDI was evident in comments by speakers in the Opening Plenary, including Director Francis Collins, M.D., Ph.D.

"Our mission will only be effectively accomplished if we establish a creative environment that is equitable and gives everyone the chance to make their contribution in the most productive way," Collins said.

Chew discussed the orientation and goals of the new office. "We are looking to make a paradigm shift, to move past processing complaints of discrimination," she said. "We aspire to a state of equity and fairness within NIH, for all individuals to advance their careers."

Women's concerns, women's empowerment

NIH Women's Symposium 2014 began at NIEHS with a webcast of presentations by nine women in leadership positions at NIH. Deputy Director of NIH Extramural Research Sally Rockey, Ph.D., provided opening remarks. Reviewing her career, Rockey noted an overarching theme. "Embrace the unexpected," she advised the audience.

The morning's agenda featured presentations on the history of women's contributions at NIH, by Stetten Museum curator Michele Lyons, of the Office of NIH History, and an Opening Plenary about the challenges that federally employed women face in the workplace, with a focus on NIH employees.

A breakout session on women and leadership provided the audience an opportunity to question panelists directly. NIEHS Director of Management Joellen Austin responded to a question about traits panelists value when hiring for a leadership position. "I look for evidence the candidate has been willing to take on tough jobs, especially those no one else wants," said Austin, echoing Rockey's earlier advice. She later described moments in her own career trajectory when she took advantage of unexpected opportunity.

Flash mentoring

The final event of the day was the flash mentoring session, held in parallel at both NIH and NIEHS. Joan Pakenham, Ph.D., introduced the NIEHS session as a series of short, focused conversations around specific questions. Referring to the morning's presentations, Pakenham noted that more women than men work at NIH, but not as many hold leadership positions. "A focus on mentoring can help us to address that," she said.

With that, dozens of mentors and mentees began 10-minute conversations, building networks and receiving feedback on questions such as how to find a mentor, how to get to know people beyond one's team or department, and queries specific to



Angela King-Herbert, D.V.M., participated as a mentee, just a week after organizing a flash mentoring and poster session for NTP trainees (see [story](#)). (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)



Lysandra Castro, biologist in the NTP Molecular Pathogenesis group, was one of more than 30 mentees who registered for the session. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)

each woman's own career. With mentors, both women and men, representing all parts of the Institute, there was an abundance of listening, advice, and new connections made.



Rodbell Auditorium was vibrant with energy and enthusiasm, such as this congratulatory moment between mentor Matthew Burr, chief of the Administrative Management Branch, and Cathy Jamison, coordinator of the Scholars Connect program. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)



Xiaohua Gao, M.D., Ph.D., research fellow in the Molecular Pathogenesis Group, shared a light moment with her mentor. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)



Among the 21 mentors participating in the event were Stavros Garantziotis, M.D., front right, Acting Clinical Director, Clinical Research Program; Joan Packenham, Ph.D., center right, Director, Office of Human Research Compliance, and Gwen Collman, Ph.D., back right, director of the Division of Extramural Research and Training. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)



In her role as K-12 Science Education & Outreach Coordinator, Hue-Chen Lao is both a mentor to students and, here, a mentee in her own career development. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)

Building EDI from a diverse customer base

In the course of re-visioning OEODM into the Office of EDI, staffers underwent a period of intense program evaluation that included customer surveys, focus groups, interviews, and a rigorous examination of the program to better serve its customers; impact civil rights, diversity, and inclusion; and make a lasting difference in the NIH culture and workforce demographics.

To celebrate the launch of EDI, stakeholders involved in building the new Office of EDI participated in a full schedule of events, breakout sessions, and training.

- March 24 - Opening Plenary, breakout sessions, and Resource Group Fair
- March 25 - EDI Training Day, with topics ranging from resume writing, Equal Employment Opportunity for supervisors and employees, and antibullying training
- March 26 - Women's Symposium 2014, honoring Women's History Month, including flash mentoring session
- March 27 - EDI Open House, which gave participants an opportunity to visit EDI offices in Rockville, Md., and on the NIH Campus in Bethesda

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