

## Celebrating Women's Contributions in Cardiovascular Health on International Day of Women and Girls in Science

In honor of International Day of Women and Girls in Science on February 11, 2025, the BioSciences Learning Center hosted an event dedicated to celebrating the invaluable contributions of women in science. Organized by LifeNet Health's Women in Science Committee, comprised of distinguished members including Dr. Elena Gianulis, Dr. Julie McLean, Dr. Claudia Muratori, Joan Newcomb, Dr. Eda Rogers, and Dr. Xiaofei Qin, the event was both informative and inspiring.



Focusing on women's heart and cardiovascular health, the program featured a keynote address by Dr. Sarah E. Joyner, a leading cardiologist at Sentara Cardiology Specialists and Director of Advanced Cardiac Imaging. Dr. Joyner provided critical insights into the pressing issues surrounding cardiac care for women and the pressing need for research and advocacy in this space.

Additionally, a panel of accomplished women shared their diverse perspectives on cardiac care and leadership in the scientific community. Panelists included:

- Christy Cheeks, a dedicated P&L Trainer with 25 years at LifeNet Health
- Alyce Jones, PhD, LifeNet Health's VP of Quality Assurance and Scientific Liaison with 24 years of service
- Emily Baer, a Product Development Engineer with six years of experience
- Payal Sohoni, General Manager of LifeNet Health's cardiovascular team with 15 years at the organization.

"I appreciate that LifeNet Health has women in science and women in leadership programs. It solidifies in my mind that LifeNet Health values the contributions of women, and they're not going to stand for the biases of the past. It solidifies for me that I'm right where I should be," said Sohoni, reflecting many attendees' sentiments.

During her keynote, Dr. Joyner emphasized the historical neglect of women's heart health, noting that these diseases are the leading cause of death among women globally—

surpassing all cancers combined. Between the 1980s and 1990s, advancements in treatments like statins and angioplasty significantly reduced cardiovascular deaths in men, while there was no comparable decline for women.

It was only after a pivotal 1993 article published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* that the medical community began to recognize the disparity in research and treatment for women regarding heart disease. Dr. Joyner highlighted the persistence of being understudied, under-recognized, under-diagnosed, under-treated, and under-represented in clinical trials, which led to a profound need for greater awareness and action.

Dr. Joyner further elaborated on the prevalence of heart and cardiovascular diseases in women, pointing out key risk factors and symptoms that may differ from those experienced by men. To empower patients, she encouraged women to bring prepared questions to doctor appointments, as time with physicians can feel rushed. She also discussed proactive steps for heart health and provided a glimpse into emerging research and advancements in the field.

The event concluded with a Q&A session, where panelists engaged with the audience on topics such as cardiac care, current research, emerging technologies, and their personal experiences in the scientific community.

"It's important to see someone that looks like you in these spaces. That's something that helps inspire you—that you could be one of the three girls in a class of 50 guys, but you have just as much of a right to be there. You have just as much of a right to prove yourself, to be successful, to work hard, and you belong in that room," said Jones, reinforcing the significance of visibility and inclusion in STEM.

This event not only celebrated the achievements of women in science but also highlighted the need for continued advocacy and research in women's cardiovascular health, inspiring future generations to break barriers and strive for equality.