



# MARCH NEWSLETTER

The Women's Health Advocacy Club aims to raise awareness and break the stigma surrounding health issues faced by individuals who are female-identifying.

**INTERESTED IN WOMEN'S  
HEALTH ADVOCACY?**

Stay tuned to learn about  
how to get involved!

# THIS MONTH QWHA PROMOTES



*Women's History Month &  
Autoimmune Awareness Month*

# WHAT ARE AUTOIMMUNE DISEASES?

- Autoimmune disorders are characterized as a condition in which the host's **immune system** mistakenly **attacks itself**.
- These disorders result in a **systemic** reaction by attacking multiple organs or may be localized to attacking one specific organ.
- Autoimmune diseases present with a clear gender bias with a greater prevalence amongst women, occurring at a rate of **2 to 1**.





# MALE BIAS IN MEDICINE

For much of documented history, women have been excluded from medical and science knowledge production, essentially ending up with a healthcare system, among other things in society, that has been **made by men for men.**



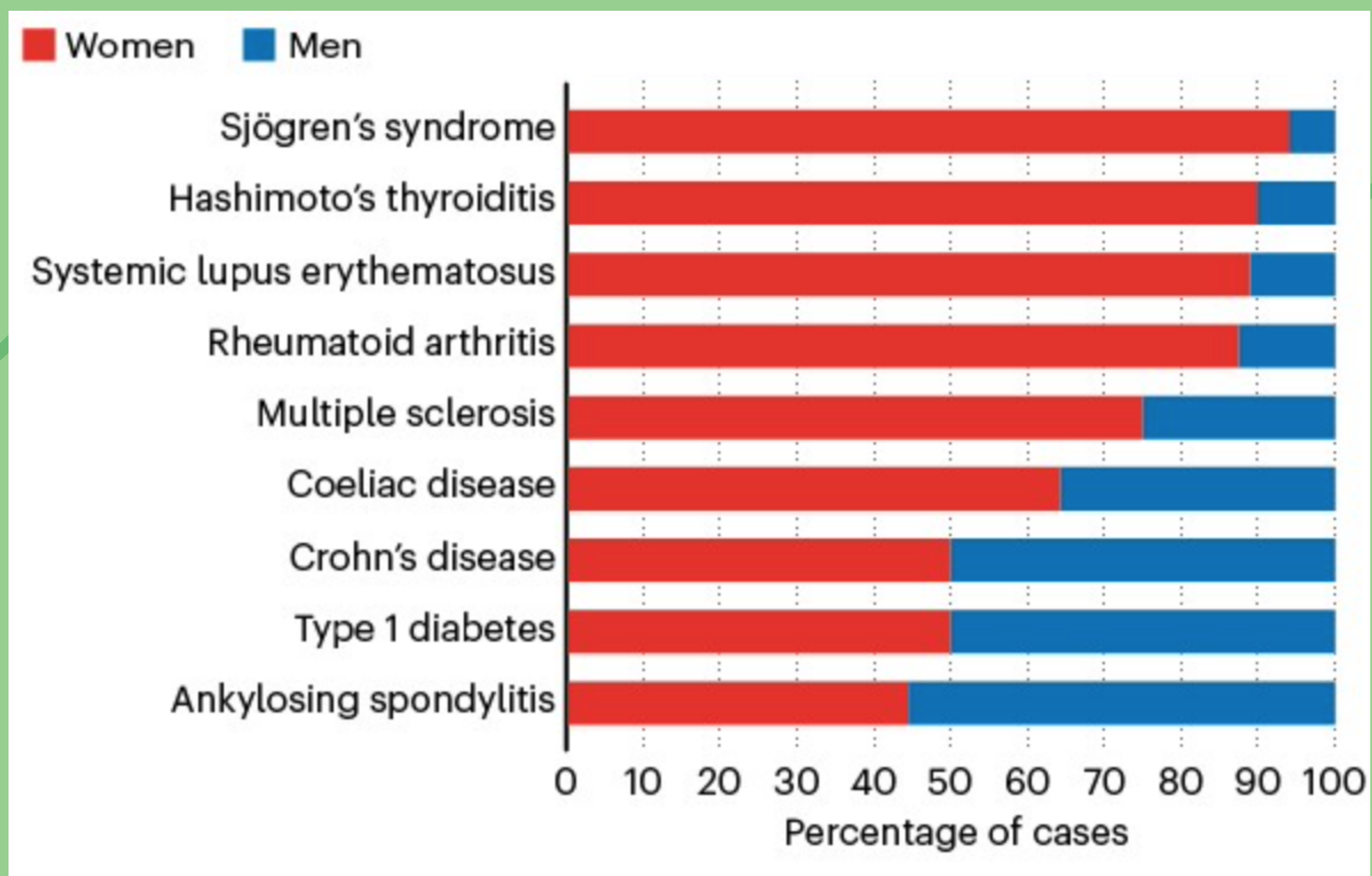
## THE HISTORY OF SEX DIFFERENCES



When Rhonda Voskuhl was a postdoctoral fellow at the US National Institutes of Health (NIH) in the mid-1990s, it was common knowledge among clinicians that multiple sclerosis (MS) — an autoimmune disease that affects the brain and spinal cord — was about twice as common in women than in men. Today, she says, the ratio is closer to **3 to 1.**

Voskuhl, M.D.  
Neurology

# GENDER DIFFERENCES IN AUTOIMMUNE DISEASE



Back in the 1990s, as Voskuhl was beginning to insist on studying male and female mice side by side, some researchers in other fields were taking similar steps. At first, these groups were working mostly in isolation. Over the years that followed, enough research accumulated to legitimize the idea that there were biological forces at work. In 1996, for example, Voskuhl established that female mouse models of MS are likely to be more unwell than are male models. That made it harder to support the outdated argument that women simply complain more about the same symptoms.



In 2006, a group of researchers from the Society for Women's Health Research founded the Organization for the Study of Sex Differences to connect specialists across disciplines, aid research, and promote discoveries. Those structural developments happened alongside another trend, Voskuhl says, "a rise in the number of women who were establishing themselves in the top tiers of science."

**BUT THE STUDY OF SEX DIFFERENCES IN AUTOIMMUNE DISEASE AND OTHER CONDITIONS STILL FACES SIGNIFICANT OBSTACLES. MOST SCIENTISTS WORKING ON SEX DIFFERENCES IN DISEASE ARE WOMEN, AND MANY RESEARCHERS STILL CONSIDER THE TOPIC TO BE 'A WOMEN'S ISSUE'.**

It took until 2014 for the NIH to begin to acknowledge the problem of male bias in preclinical trials, and until 2016 for it to mandate that any research money it granted must include female animals.

# TRAILBLAZING WOMEN IN CANADIAN HEALTHCARE

## DR. EMILY STOWE



- First female physician to practice in Ontario, specializing in treating diseases in women and children
- Founder of Canadian Women's Suffrage Association, fighting tirelessly for equality in the medical and educational professions and opportunities
- Practiced medicine for 10 years without a Canadian medical license later earning one from the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario in 1880

## DR. FOZIA ALVI

- Family physician nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize for her humanitarian work advocating for Rohingya Muslim mothers and victims of sexual assault
- Opened a charity-based maternity hospital in rural Pakistan to improve the sustainability of her humanitarian efforts
- Founded and runs Humanity Auxilium, a foundation for medical relief missions



## DR. MARGO GREENWOOD



- Indigenous scholar of Cree ancestry, professor of First Nation Studies and Education, and the Academic Leader of the National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health
- Focuses on public health, education of Indigenous children, and early childhood care and has worked with the UN, UNICEF, and the Canadian Reference Group to the WHO's Commission on Social Determinants
- Awarded with the National Aboriginal Achievement Award for Education, Queen's Jubilee Medal, and Perry Shawana Child Care Award





*Stay Tuned for our...*

# SEPTEMBER NEWSLETTER



# REFERENCES

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