

Research as the Portal to Gender-Specific Medicine

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During the past 15 years, the focus of research on women's health has evolved from ensuring that clinical studies include women to now requiring that research define differences between men and women and that sex/gender differences be addressed in the design of biomedical research, including basic biological studies. The science of sex/gender factors in health and disease provides the foundation for establishing gender/sex-specific health care delivery for women or men. The Office of Research on Women's Health (ORWH) at the National Institutes of Health (NIH), DHHS has implemented many policies and programs that are beginning to yield beneficial results as well as new scientific opportunities for gender-specific information and medicine. The NIH policy requiring the inclusion of women and diverse racial/ethnic groups in clinical research as well as analyses of resulting data for validity of differences has been instrumental in facilitating sex/gender oriented analyses and scientific design. The complexity of the science has led recently to interdisciplinary approaches to research on women's health and on sex/gender factors, and to the advancement of careers of young investigators in sex/gender oriented research. In addition, the ORWH fully utilizes collaborative efforts with other components of the NIH as well as the broader scientific, health care and public advocacy communities to determine scientific priorities and to communicate the valuable information resulting from research studies to health care professionals and the public. Some of the policies and programs that have and are contributing to the role of research as the matrix for gender specific medicine will be presented and discussed.