



SOCIETY to  
IMPROVE  
DIAGNOSIS in  
MEDICINE



WOMENHEART  
THE NATIONAL COALITION FOR  
WOMEN WITH HEART DISEASE

# PATIENTS AS ADVOCATES: Being Part of the Solution to the Misdiagnosis of Heart Disease in Women

WomenHeart hosted a Convening on Missed and Delayed Diagnosis of Heart Disease in Women<sup>1</sup>, resulting in a number of research and policy considerations. But beyond that, there are ways patients can support and improve diagnostic quality and safety for women with heart disease.

## What you can do for yourself:

- Review the Convening **summary**, keeping in mind some of the more common reasons women are misdiagnosed:
  - Symptoms of heart disease and heart attack can be different in women than men and therefore, both women and their doctors may not recognize the risk to their health.
  - Time pressure in the clinic can lead to the omission of relevant information in a patient's history, an incomplete physical exam, or to a breakdown in trust between the patient and clinician.
  - Implicit or explicit bias based on a patient's age, sex, gender, race, ethnicity or appearance, or beliefs about women's stress or anxiety, that may discount heart disease as a possible diagnosis.
- Pay close attention to your health — learn your family health history and track any symptoms you may experience.
- If you develop new or different symptoms, see your provider, and push for more information if you feel that your questions are not being answered.
- Consult **WomenHeart's resources** on signs, symptoms and risk factors for different types of heart disease — go to your appointments informed.

## What you can do for fellow patients:

- Spread the word to your friends and family that heart disease is the number one killer of women. Raising

awareness can help empower people with knowledge and combat misdiagnosis.

- Support and encourage women experiencing symptoms to advocate for themselves and seek additional opinions if they are being dismissed. If you are a woman living with heart disease, consider volunteering to **become a WomenHeart Champion**.
- For anyone trying to navigate a diagnosis, point them to the **Patient Toolkit for Diagnosis**.

## What you can do to improve healthcare for women:

- Join your local hospital or health system's Patient Family Advisory Council, or PFAC, and suggest addressing the issue of misdiagnosis of heart disease in women.
- Share your story of misdiagnosis with WomenHeart (email [patientsupport@womenheart.org](mailto:patientsupport@womenheart.org)) or the Society to Improve Diagnosis in Medicine's **Patient Storybank**.
- **Sign up** to receive WomenHeart's call to action alerts to email your members of Congress and advocate for policies to support women with heart disease.
- Sign up to be a **PCORI Ambassador** and find opportunities to partner in heart disease-related diagnostic research.



on Missed and Delayed Diagnosis  
of Heart Disease in Women

<sup>1</sup>The Convening was hosted in partnership with the Society to Improve Diagnosis in Medicine and funded through a Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute (PCORI) Eugene Washington PCORI Engagement Award (EACC-18922).