







Grow and Advance through Intentional Networking: A pilot program to foster connections within the Women's Empowerment and Leadership Initiative in the Society for Pediatric Anesthesia

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Abstract

Background: The Women's Empowerment and Leadership Initiative in the Society for Pediatric Anesthesia was established to support women's efforts to achieve promotion, leadership positions, and equity in pediatric anesthesiology through coaching, mentoring, sponsorship, and networking. Career advancement relies on the establishment of mentoring relationships within institutions and at regional and national levels. Prior to the SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) pandemic, networking was primarily conducted at large national meetings.

Aims: When national meetings were canceled by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Women's Empowerment and Leadership Initiative sought to reduce networking barriers by creating a pilot program called "Grow and Advance through Intentional Networking" (GAIN).

Materials & Methods: Monthly 1-h virtual GAIN sessions were developed based on topics requested by the Women's Empowerment and Leadership Initiative members. Faculty facilitated psychologically safe small-group discussions to maximize engagement.

Results: We present an overview of our pilot GAIN program, which has been well received by the Women's Empowerment and Leadership Initiative members and met with continuous demand for more sessions.

Discussion: Professional networking is critical for career advancement and for developing and maintaining a sense of community and well-being. Early- and mid-career physicians depend on these relationships to facilitate academic productivity and promotion.

Conclusion: Programs like the Women's Empowerment and Leadership Initiative GAIN are critical for advancing our specialty and supporting the well-being of pediatric anesthesiologists. GAIN addresses barriers to professional networking, including during the COVID-19 pandemic.

KEYWORDS

anesthesiology, COVID-19, female, leadership, mentoring, well-being

1 | INTRODUCTION

The SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) pandemic has presented both challenges and opportunity for academic medicine faculty who want to build their professional networks and advance their careers. While physical distancing requirements and travel restrictions have made in-person networking impractical, if not impossible, videoconferencing software has enabled faculty to connect virtually with others, regardless of location. The “Grow and Advance through Intentional Networking” (GAIN) program in the Women’s Empowerment and Leadership Initiative (WELI) was developed to increase opportunities for networking and career growth in academic medicine during the COVID-19 pandemic and as the pandemic subsides. GAIN program sessions addressed both professional development issues (effective communication, negotiation, team building, and delegation) and personal impediments to career advancement and workplace inequities (microaggressions, impostor syndrome, adaptability, and anxiety/resilience).

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, early-career faculty was advised to build their professional networks by joining professional medical societies¹ and attending regional and national conferences.² However, even when attendance at in-person networking events and conferences was possible, early-career faculty often faced significant impediments to attendance, including limited financial resources and nonclinical time. Moreover, junior and mid-career faculty members could feel hesitant to approach more prominent, established faculty at in-person conferences and networking events, especially if no prior relationship existed. Senior faculty may have limited time for focused and in-depth conversations with their more junior colleagues owing to scheduling demands, leadership responsibilities, and multiple commitments. Furthermore, at larger meetings, most conversations are brief, occur in crowded venues, and have frequent interruptions. It can be difficult to engage in deep and meaningful conversations that facilitate and encourage long-term connections.

Establishing venues for professional networking is particularly critical for anesthesiologists, many of whom suffer from high levels of social isolation.^{3,4} The siloed nature of anesthesia practice rarely allows for social opportunities common to other medical specialties, such as attendance at lectures or daily patient rounds. Even within the operating room environment, opportunities for social interaction with other anesthesia colleagues are often limited. The shift in academic medicine at many institutions to a private practice model, wherein attendings work alone in operating rooms as opposed to supervising trainees, has further exacerbated isolation in an environment that traditionally encouraged interaction through teaching and shared patient care.

With in-person conferences canceled as a consequence of physical distancing requirements and travel restrictions, we created new

opportunities for networking and career growth for WELI members. We sought to break down the hierarchical and rigid nature of professional networking by establishing virtual facilitated networking sessions within WELI. WELI’s mission is to empower highly productive female pediatric anesthesiologists to achieve equity, promotion, and leadership through coaching, mentoring, and leadership development.⁵ More than 170 faculty—both women and men—from more than 60 institutions participate in WELI as protégés and advisors. There are two categories of WELI members, proteges and advisors. WELI advisors are individuals (any gender) that have achieved a leadership position(s) and have a history of successful mentoring in their area of expertise. They can be nominated by someone else or self-nominate to participate. Prospective protégés are women who must meet the following criteria: be at least 3 years beyond completing their first fellowship; have demonstrated contribution to a project related to their career development; and outline an area of interest and any work already done in that area. While self-nominations are accepted, protégé applicants are also highly encouraged to be nominated by either her current Chair, division Chief, private practice executive or other leader, a current or past WELI member, or a senior leader in active academic practice who holds the rank of Professor or Associate Professor. Further information about the WELI program and applying is available at <https://weli.pedsanesthesia.org>. To reduce networking barriers that have been heightened by the COVID-19 pandemic, we created the GAIN pilot program within WELI. Here, we describe our GAIN program, which we designed to enhance professional networking during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.

2 | GAIN DESIGN AND STRUCTURE

Beginning in 2018 and until the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, the SPA fall and spring in-person conferences included WELI workshops with didactic and facilitated networking sessions that were led by executive coaches and content experts. Facilitated networking provides a structured method for faculty to discuss a mutually shared interest or topic as a byway to meet each other. For example, after a brief introduction, participants are given an opening question to begin their discussion and facilitate sharing of experiences or ideas. This format is in contrast to networking that occurs spontaneously or that is meant to develop from a simple introduction. Spontaneous networking can be challenging for many people, including those who are shy or junior in their career. Facilitated networking provides a common ground upon which to build further relationships.

WELI participant feedback showed that facilitated networking was a highly valued and integral part of the in-person WELI

workshop experience. WELI workshops typically lasted 4–5 h. An additional 45 min of facilitated networking time was added to the 2019 and 2020 workshops in response to consistent participant requests.

Even with these additional networking sessions, many WELI members asked for more networking opportunities. In a survey study approved by the Johns Hopkins University Institutional Review Board (IRB00250768), WELI members were asked about their specific needs for professional development. The responses revealed ongoing need for formal networking support (Table 1). When the COVID-19 pandemic began in the spring of 2020, WELI leadership

pivoted to create a virtual, facilitated networking format for members to connect with one another through the pilot GAIN program.

The first GAIN session was launched in May 2020 using Zoom videoconferencing (Zoom Video Communications Inc). We limited the networking sessions a priori to 1 h to decrease the time burden for WELI members juggling busy schedules and to maximize participation. Approximately three GAIN sessions per month were offered during weekdays, weekends, afternoons, and evenings. This scheduling flexibility provided a variety of options for faculty with caretaking responsibilities and also enhanced accessibility for members who lived in different time zones. Participants signed up by using

TABLE 1 Survey responses from WELI members

Survey category and questions	Feedback
Early feedback from WELI members that led to creating GAIN	
"Has WELI helped you?" "Do you need any assistance from the WELI steering committee?"	"I am an introvert and networking is something I used to avoid" "I think it would be great to have more networking opportunities within WELI. I am unable to attend (the conferences in person)" "I believe having some networking possibilities with other coaches (advisors) would be great"
Feedback from WELI GAIN participants	
Please describe any impact WELI has had on expanding your professional network and developing meaningful relationships	"Through WELI I met X (who is not my mentor) but has become my career coach, collaborator and generally supportive force in my life. I feel incredibly more connected to various other people throughout the country because of the GAIN sessions" "Have been allowed to meet a lot of new people. Love the GAIN sessions for this"
Please describe any impact WELI has had on clarifying your sense of purpose or improving your well-being	"Love the WELI gain (sic) sessions. They are valuable for sure." "Love the GAIN sessions to connect with people about well-being and issues that we face personally as a woman"
Please describe how specific WELI program features were valuable to you	"Love the workshops, but even more I love time spent with my mentor and my mentee. ... I loved talking to people on the GAIN sessions - connection is everything" "Really love the GAIN sessions and working with others on the Wellness Committee" "GAIN sessions are fantastic because they meet needs but also foster personal relationships and allow us to feel our strength as a community. ... Working with both a mentor and a mentee helped me grow as in individual and recognize the strength of my own contributions and abilities" "GAIN sessions have really helped me to feel connected to other members and I love how they break down barriers between levels. Having a mix of well-known SPA people with fresh new attendings is great" "Having been paired with an Advisor, it was very important to learn the ropes of reproach and how to manage a (large program project) and receiving feedback how much to fill your plate and how to be better in writing. GAIN was amazing and so grateful that we had these amazing people mentor us through a difficult time in May. Being part of WELI gives an amazing sense of being cared for and believed and being appreciated and just knowing that there are people out there, who are there to be there for you no matter what. What an amazing community" "LOVE the GAIN sessions" "The GAIN sessions allowed me to view others and their barriers in other institutions." "The GAIN sessions have been a great way for me to meet other proteges and advisors outside of my pairing, and the monthly format has helped me cultivate these relationships." "Excellent learning in the workshops, positive group collaborative learning in the GAIN sessions"
What can we do to improve WELI?	"I have attempted to sign up for multiple GAIN sessions. I understand that it is helpful to limit the attendees. However, each time I go to sign up the spots are already full" "Continue the workshops and GAIN sessions (I'm looking forward the upcoming one)"

Abbreviation: SPA, Society of Pediatric Anesthesia.

TABLE 2 Topics and key concepts discussed at GAIN sessions

Topic	Key concepts
Challenging conversations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 factors of crucial conversations⁶: (1) high stakes, (2) differing opinions, (3) strong emotions • STATE method to manage challenging conversations⁶S: Share facts T: Tell your story A: Ask for the other's paths T: Talk tentatively E: Encourage testing • I-Cubed conversation model^a: Intention + Inquiry = Invitation
Team building ^b	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hire self-motivated people and let them thrive • Set clear goals • Assign tasks that match skill levels • Listen • Support • Connect with people authentically • Praise and recognize accomplishment
Delegation ^a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 levels of delegation¹1. Take care of this for me 2. Explore. Decide within limits 3. Explore. Decide. Run by me 4. Share your advice. I'll decide 5. Research this for me 6. Do it • The WONDERS of a delegation conversation W: WHY—Why is this important? O: OUTCOME—What is the desired Outcome? N: NEST—How can it Nest into their goals/job? D: DEADLINE—When is the Deadline? E: EXPECTATIONS—What are your Expectations? R: RESOURCES—What Resources are needed or available? S: STATUS—Plan for Status updates?
Anxiety and resilience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The 3 “P”s of emotional resilience⁷1. Personalization 2. Permanence 3. Pervasiveness • Put it in perspective exercise: steps to combat catastrophic thinking⁸ 1. Describe the activating event 2. Capture worst-case thoughts 3. Generate best-case thoughts 4. Identify most likely outcomes 5. Develop a plan for dealing with most likely outcomes
Adaptability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Definition of adaptability: An ability or willingness to change in order to suit different conditions⁹ • 4 ways to boost adaptability¹⁰1. Change your thought process 2. Force yourself to take risks 3. Encourage others to be open minded 4. Embrace learning
Microaggressions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Macroaggressions vs. microaggressions¹¹ a. Microaggressions: Everyday slights, invalidations, and offensive behaviors that occur at the individual level b. Macroaggressions: Occur at the systemic level (institutional and structural) • Microintervention strategies: Everyday words/deeds to counteract microaggressions¹¹ a. Make the “invisible” visible b. Disarm the microaggression c. Educate offender about the metacommunications they send d. Seek external support when needed
Imposter syndrome, the inner critic and self-empathy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Imposter syndrome¹² a. Underappreciation of one's own skills, talents, and value b. Mismatch between internal beliefs about oneself vs. external evidence and outside perspective • The inner critic or critical inner voice: Well-integrated pattern of negative thoughts toward ourselves and others¹³ • Self-compassion and self-empathy are key to managing the inner critic¹⁴ • 3 elements of self-compassion¹⁴: (1) self-kindness, (2) common humanity, (3) mindfulness

^aAdapted from the SPA WELI workshop on March 15, 2019 “Rising Leaders: Defining Your Personal Leadership.” © 2019, Ellen R. Moore, Moore Creative Strategies, LLC.

^bAdapted from the SPA WELI workshop on October 20, 2019 “Women in Leadership: Essential Tools for Success.” Elizabeth Brill, MD, MBA, Physician and Executive Coaching, ebrillmd@gmail.com.

a Doodle (Doodle) poll sent by e-mail and advertised on the WELL Twitter account. Depending on the topic, we limited session attendance to 5–8 people plus two facilitators to promote active participation by all attendees. Facilitators ranged from early-career faculty to senior leadership, with more junior faculty often paired with a senior faculty member. We intentionally promoted a casual and open environment by explaining that no special preparation was necessary. We instructed the participants that casual dress was acceptable, and children were welcome to appear in the Zoom meetings to allow faculty with childcare commitments to join.

Each month, the GAIN sessions focused on a single theme or topic, many of which had been covered in the prior WELL workshops (Table 2). Before the first session, we sent an e-mail survey to GAIN participants to identify topics of high interest, which we then narrowed to two based on popularity: difficult conversations and building a cohesive team. Session handouts with key points were e-mailed to participants before the meeting (Figure 1), but participants were

advised that they were not required to review these materials ahead of time.

Each GAIN session began with a brief introduction by a senior faculty member who shared a personal experience or hardship. Questions about confidentiality and lack of psychological safety can be barriers to participant vulnerability in small groups, especially for early-career faculty. Therefore, to instill trust and encourage openness, we intentionally normalized sharing behavior at the beginning of each session. Then, participants were placed into two breakout rooms with approximately four participants and one facilitator in each room. Each facilitator focused on one topic (eg, difficult conversations or building cohesive teams), and each breakout discussion lasted for 20 min. Facilitators began each breakout session with a brief summary of the discussion points from session-specific worksheets with the goal of encouraging deeper conversation (Figure 1). WELL leaders created the facilitators' worksheets and content resources. After the initial 20-min session, facilitators were switched

Anxiety & Resilience GAIN Session Handout

"The expectation that we can be immersed in suffering and loss daily and not be touched by it is as unrealistic as expecting to be able to walk through water without getting wet."

-Rachel Remen

Poisons of Resilience

1. Personalization

- Thinking that you are the problem instead of external cause
- RESILIENCE TECHNIQUE: Realizing that outside factors have caused a bad situation allows us to reduce the blame and criticism we put on ourselves

2. Permanence

- Thinking a bad situation will last forever
- RESILIENCE TECHNIQUE: Those who think setbacks are temporary have improved ability to accept and adapt for the future

3. Pervasiveness

- All areas of your life are impacted-hopeless
- RESILIENCE TECHNIQUE: Delineate what part of your day is impacted by a problem, and more importantly what is intact. This will help your capacity to persevere

4 Steps to Combatting Catastrophic Thinking

Step 1: Write down the ticker tape chain

Step 2: Estimate the probabilities of your worst-case fears

Step 3: Generate best case alternatives

Step 4: Identify most likely implications

Resilient Actions

1. Pace yourself
2. Breathe
3. Compartmentalize and reduce cognitive load (serial monotasking)
4. Maintain good health habits
5. Stay connected
6. Take detachment breaks
7. Ingenuity
8. Cultivate compassion for yourself and others
9. Find a "battle buddy"
10. Deeply listening and acknowledging

Adapted from:

1. Seligman MEP. *Learned Optimism*. Random House; 2018
2. Wiebe J. What is Catastrophic Thinking? (And How to Stop). September 13, 2018. Accessed December 18, 2020. <https://www.talkspace.com/blog/catastrophic-thinking-thought-spirals-how-to-stop/>
3. Fernandez R. 5 Ways to Boost Your Resilience at Work. June 27, 2016. Accessed December 18, 2020. <https://hbr.org/2016/06/627-building-resilience-ic-5-ways-to-build-your-personal-resilience-at-work>

FIGURE 1 Example GAIN session handout for session on anxiety and resilience


to the other breakout room so all participants could engage in both topics. After the second breakout session concluded, all participants were reunited for a final 10-min wrap-up and discussion of the next steps.

A designated information technology (IT) person was identified and present for each session to generate the Zoom link and invitation, create breakout rooms, assign participants, and give time reminders (Figure 2). This setup allowed facilitators to concentrate fully on presenting their session and encouraging discussion rather than on the technology. WELI IT support was initially provided by volunteers from the WELI membership who were familiar with the Zoom platform. The WELI IT team held training sessions to expand the number of WELI members familiar with the virtual platform's functions to a GAIN IT team of six.

Subsequent GAIN sessions have varied in their format based on the nature of the discussion topic and continued feedback from participants. To foster connections among WELI members and to

create a forum to discuss the personal toll of recent events in the United States, including the COVID-19 pandemic and the large-scale protests about race-based violence and political conflicts, the WELI leadership organized GAIN sessions on anxiety, resilience, adaptability, and microaggressions in June through November 2020. To enhance psychological safety, we limited these sessions to six participants and two facilitators without a breakout session. WELI leaders encouraged connections and additional conversations after the session by sending a follow-up e-mail that included all participants' e-mail addresses.

Based on the popularity and success of the single-session GAIN offerings, a pilot multi-week GAIN series on meditation ("Exploring Mindfulness Meditation: An Introductory Course") was developed by a WELI advisor certified in mindfulness meditation teaching (Nina Guzzetta, MD). This special offering required a 1-h weekly commitment, lasted for 5 weeks, and covered a variety of topics related to building a mindfulness meditation practice. Due



IT Team Guide for GAIN Sessions

Responsibilities Before Session	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create Zoom invitation • Create Outlook invitation
Session Format	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1-hour session • Purpose of session and member introductions (5-10 min) • Breakout session 1 (20 min) • Breakout session 2 (20 min) • Wrap-up (5-10 min)
Responsibilities During Session: Breakout Rooms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 breakout rooms • Set countdown to 120 seconds • For session 2, keep same breakout rooms and move facilitators
Responsibilities During Session: Timekeeping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each session is 20 minutes long • At 15-minute mark: Broadcast 5 minutes left • At 18-minute mark: Close breakout rooms
Should I Participate in the Discussion?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes! Please keep your camera on • Facilitators are aware you may not be able to participate fully in the discussion due to IT team responsibilities

FIGURE 2 Information technology team guide with responsibilities

to the nature of the program, it was limited to eight WELL members and filled quickly. The meditation GAIN sessions received excellent reviews from the participants and have been repeated due to continued demand.

3 | GAIN RECEPTION

The GAIN pilot program has been enormously popular with WELL members, with all virtual networking session slots filling within 1–2 h after release of the e-mail announcement, regardless of the topic offered. WELL members have repeatedly sent e-mails requesting more GAIN sessions or to be placed on a waiting list, resulting in additional sessions being scheduled to accommodate demand. Session participants have ranged in rank from clinical instructor to professor with a balanced mix of WELL advisors and protégés from all areas of the country. Out of 85 GAIN participant slots from 20 GAIN sessions between May and November 2020, 100% of the slots were filled in addition to the two facilitators per session. Twenty-five (29.4%) participants had been part of a prior session and signed up again. Three men participated in GAIN (two facilitators and three participants).

Survey feedback from GAIN participants illustrates the program's high value. In November 2020, an anonymous survey was e-mailed to people who had been in WELL for 3–28 months (IRB00250768). We received survey responses from 92 of 152 (60.5%) WELL members, and 30 of 56 (54%) members who had participated in at least one GAIN session. All responses with the search term "GAIN" are listed in Table 1.

4 | CULTURE OF EQUITY

Gender equity in academic medicine is an ongoing issue; although women make up 48% of medical school graduates, they constitute only 25% of full professors at academic institutions.¹⁵ Mentorship and sponsorship are vital to narrowing this gap.¹⁶ Early-career faculty at smaller academic institutions may additionally experience a lack of local mentorship and sponsorship, which can lead to further inequity from decreased visibility and lack of access to national opportunities. Indeed, WELL was created specifically to assist early- and mid-career female pediatric anesthesiologists in overcoming such barriers.

By empowering WELL protégés to network with pediatric anesthesiology leaders through informal facilitated networking, GAIN can help promote a culture of equity. Although most GAIN participants were junior faculty, several female professors, department chairs, division chiefs, and other leaders joined the GAIN sessions and offered guidance and support to WELL members at earlier stages of their careers. Importantly, GAIN participants acquired the insight that today's leaders in pediatric anesthesiology had similar problems early in their careers, and discussions encompassed the need to continue promoting both equity and diversity in our specialty. The small number of participants in each session facilitates meaningful

conversations and enhances participants' ability to create relationships that might be difficult to generate during traditional, large, in-person academic conferences. Moreover, by emphasizing psychological safety, confidentiality, and professional approachability during GAIN sessions, we are able to break down the hierarchical nature of professional networking and promote sharing between participants.

5 | BUILDING COMMUNITY AND ENHANCING WELL-BEING

Social support and community at work are key drivers of physician engagement and well-being.¹⁷ Professional medical and specialty societies can fulfill this need at the national level, but their meetings generally occur only one to two times yearly. Given that personal connection is vital to establishing a successful mentoring relationship,¹⁸ we structured the GAIN program with the goal of promoting a sense of community. As WELL GAIN sessions occur approximately monthly, are offered at multiple different times during each month, and can be attended from any location, members have a greater ability to participate than they would at national meetings. This accessibility also enhances the goal of promoting a sense of community.

Grow and Advance through Intentional Networking benefits faculty at all ranks by lowering temporal, spatial, and mental barriers to interaction between protégés and advisors. Unlike professional networking at in-person events, virtual networking facilitates frequent contact between participants, in some cases as often as once per month. Faculty can participate without the need to travel to a national academic conference, which also lowers financial barriers.² Faculty commit upfront to a 1-h session with the expectation that they will actively participate in the discussion, and session topics are specifically designed to build on common experiences. Because this format provides an opportunity for participants to hear about challenges that others have overcome, it encourages attendees to share opinions and experiences and to engage in collective brainstorming of solutions. Furthermore, by having participants share their stories, GAIN sessions promote follow-up between participants after the session itself.

For protégés, GAIN offers a venue in which to build a national network by connecting with additional WELL members. For advisors, GAIN can enhance work-derived satisfaction by providing additional opportunities to mentor, coach, and sponsor junior colleagues without a significant time or financial investment.

6 | IMPACT ON PROFESSIONAL GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

In addition to mentorship, sponsorship is critical for career advancement and promotion, especially for women and underrepresented minorities in medicine.¹⁹ In academic medicine, specific examples of sponsorship include recommendations for an award, offering a high-profile speaking

opportunity, or consideration for a leadership role. Networking, both within and across institutions, can also play an important part in creating writing and speaking opportunities to further advance careers.

By promoting personal connection, GAIN sessions help early-career faculty build relationships with senior faculty, leading to additional career advancement opportunities. GAIN sessions also provide concrete opportunities for early-career faculty to participate as session facilitators and gain exposure and experience working with senior faculty. Though the GAIN program was developed during the COVID-19 pandemic, it will be continued even when in-person conferences resume as a mechanism to facilitate faculty connections throughout the year and support networking opportunities for faculty who are unable to travel to in-person conferences. The impact of GAIN on tangible metrics of career development (such as promotion) will be assessed in the future through a longitudinal survey study. GAIN has already created an increased sense of community and belonging for attendees, both of which have been shown to be connected to overall well-being and career sustainability for physicians (Table 1). Although intangible, the benefits of engagement and community for anesthesiologists are immense in ameliorating social isolation and burnout.²⁰

7 | CHALLENGES

We acknowledge several challenges to implementing and maintaining the WELI GAIN networking program. WELI member access to sessions has been a recurring issue. Because the capacity of each session is intentionally kept small, these sessions fill up rapidly, leaving some members feeling disappointed because they did not have the opportunity to see or respond to the e-mail announcement quickly enough. We have expanded the number and frequency of sessions to try to accommodate demand. The high demand for GAIN sessions exemplifies the urgent need to improve professional networking among pediatric anesthesiologists. Scheduling sessions in a way that best accommodates members across all time zones has also been a challenge. West coast members need to ensure that they can get out of work in time, while East coast participants may be in the midst of nighttime family routines. The mix of weekday and weekend time slots combined with communications from WELI leaders encouraging casual dress and the acceptance of family life onscreen has made sessions accessible to faculty with caregiver responsibilities. Interestingly, this approach offered a side benefit of demonstrating shared humanity, further promoting our ability to see each other as individuals and facilitating meaningful interchange without the typical hierarchical constraints. We also acknowledge that we do not yet have a formal mechanism to ensure that participants stay in touch after a GAIN session. Therefore, it is unclear whether long-term connections are being made.

8 | CONCLUSION

Professional networking is critical both for career advancement and for fostering a sense of community and well-being. The COVID-19

pandemic has exacerbated networking barriers that already existed for anesthesiologists. Our WELI GAIN pilot program uses facilitated, virtual networking to stimulate conversations on a variety of leadership and well-being topics among faculty of different academic ranks across the country, helping to ameliorate barriers inherent to the siloed nature of anesthesia practice and COVID-19. Programs like GAIN can provide opportunities to build foundations for lasting relationships and sponsorship.

Women's Empowerment and Leadership Initiative was formed to address issues of inequity in leadership and promotion for women in pediatric anesthesiology. Coaching workshops coupled with an ongoing, longitudinal curriculum are used to teach important skills and develop strengths for WELI members. The addition of the GAIN sessions adds networking as an essential component of WELI's approach to career advancement for women.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Dr. Lee is a consultant for the United States Food and Drug Administration and Edwards Life Sciences.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analyzed in this study.

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