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Stern-Gattiker Prize: The SAMS recognises two female role models

Discussions about women in leadership positions frequently refer to “female role models” – and usually to the fact that they are in short supply. This seems to be an important reason why, all too often, women do not choose to pursue an academic career. Medicine is no exception. But female role models do exist and, to enhance their visibility, the Swiss Academy of Medical Sciences (SAMS) established the Stern-Gattiker Prize in 2018. This year, the prize has been awarded to Professor Sophie de Seigneux Matthey (Geneva) and Professor Sara C. Meyer (Basel).

Only a small proportion of medical graduates in Switzerland pursue an academic career and, within this group, women are clearly underrepresented – even though they now account for over 60 per cent of all medical students. To ensure that sufficient medical scientists are available over the medium and longer term, and to improve the gender balance of teaching staff, it is essential that more women pursue a career in academic medicine. With the Stern-Gattiker Prize, launched in 2018, the SAMS is making female role models more visible, so as to motivate young women to pursue an academic career.

The 2020 Call for Nominations produced a substantial response: no fewer than 25 female medical scientists with an outstanding track record were nominated for the prize. The Jury, chaired by SAMS President Henri Bounameaux, selected two candidates – Sophie de Seigneux Matthey and Sara C. Meyer. Both hold SNSF professorships (at the Faculty of Medicine in Geneva and Basel respectively) and are research team leaders and senior physicians – Professor de Seigneux Matthey at the Nephrology Division of Geneva University Hospital (HUG), Professor Meyer at the Hematology Department of Basel University Hospital (USB).

Outstanding careers

The nomination submissions and the two scientists' CVs testify to outstanding careers: after graduating in medicine, they both undertook postdoctoral studies abroad and secured third-party funding amounting to several million Swiss francs for their research projects. Their talents were recognised by the Swiss National Science Foundation through its Ambizione and Eccellenza programmes. Both of the prizewinners are now around 40 and have a family. They are involved in teaching and mentoring activities and have already received other awards. Complementing these achievements are their human qualities, their openness and enthusiasm, which were emphasised in all the nominations submitted on their behalf.

The Stern-Gattiker Prize is named after two women with distinguished medical careers: Lina Stern (1878–1968), the first woman to hold a professorship at the Faculty of Medicine in Geneva, and Ruth Gattiker (born in 1923), who was among the first female professors appointed at the Faculty of Medicine in Zurich.

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Links

Detailed information on the Stern-Gattiker Prize: sams.ch/stern-gattiker-prize

CVs and photographs of Professor de Seigneux Matthey and Professor Meyer: sams.ch/media