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**The Ripple Effect of Advocacy**

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The room was alive with anticipation, but as I stood at the podium, I felt the weight of an entire generation’s struggles resting on my shoulders. I wasn’t just there to lead—I was there to advocate for those whose voices had been silenced for far too long. The room wasn’t just filled with students; it was filled with the stories of every woman who had ever been overlooked, doubted, or pushed aside in medicine. And I was about to speak for them.

As I addressed my peers, I remembered the woman I’d seen a few weeks earlier, sitting in the corner of the clinic, her face a mask of resignation. She’d been dismissed after every suggestion she made was met with silence. No one had bothered to ask for her input again. She wasn’t the first, and she wouldn’t be the last. But in that moment, I realized the depth of what we were facing—not just the external barriers of pay inequality, leadership exclusion, and career stagnation, but the internal toll of constant rejection. The relentless self-doubt

hat creeps in when you’re never given the space to prove your worth.

I didn’t learn about these inequities from textbooks or lectures. I learned them from my mother. I grew up watching her battle cancer in a small, rural community, where healthcare was a luxury and resources were few. I watched her fight not just for her life, but for the dignity she deserved in a system that failed to recognize her humanity. It was then that I made a promise to myself: I would become a physician—not just to heal, but to dismantle the barriers that so often stand between marginalized people and the care they deserve.

Fast forward to medical school, and I quickly discovered that those barriers weren’t just external; they were woven into the fabric of medicine itself. I saw them in unspoken assumptions, in leadership roles given to others, in pay gaps, and in the constant whispers of “maybe next time.” And worse—many of these inequities had become invisible to those who didn’t experience them. It wasn’t just about equality—it was about equity. True fairness demands more than leveling the playing field; it requires us to recognize that people’s struggles aren’t all the same.

When I was elected to lead, I knew this was my chance to amplify the voices that had been silenced for so long. It wasn’t just about leading meetings—it was about creating a space where people, especially women, could stand tall and demand to be heard. We weren’t just talking about diversity; we were talking about revolutionizing the way we practiced medicine. We were talking about changing the systems that held us back, the systems that made it seem as though our voices were too small, too insignificant to make a difference.

One evening, I led a dialogue, asking the room: “Have you ever been dismissed, overlooked, or shut down because of your gender? What did that moment feel like?” The room fell into an uneasy silence before the stories began. One woman shared how her clinical judgment was questioned in front of senior physicians—simply because she was a woman. Another spoke of being passed over for a leadership position, her qualifications disregarded in favor of a less qualified male colleague. As I listened, I felt a surge of emotion. These stories were too familiar, but they didn’t end with frustration—they sparked something greater.

A student rose, and said, “I’ve been holding this pain in for so long. But now, hearing all of you… I know I’m not alone. I will never let myself be silenced again.”

In that room, something incredible happened. We weren’t just talking about the problems we faced; we were collectively deciding that we would no longer be defined by them. The women around me were beginning to see that they were not powerless—that together, we could rewrite the narrative.

This experience showed me that advocacy isn’t just about speaking out against injustice—it’s about lighting a fire in others so they, too, will fight for change. It’s about empowering those around you to realize their worth, to recognize their strength, and to demand what they deserve. As we spoke out that evening, something bigger than just our voices was born—it was a movement, a collective declaration that we would not allow the status quo to dictate our futures. We were no longer asking for permission to succeed—we were taking what was rightfully ours.

Gender equity in medicine, for me, is not a future aspiration—it’s a revolution that begins now. It’s about breaking down the walls that separate us from leadership, respect, and opportunity. It’s about ensuring that no woman, regardless of her background or position, ever has to ask for permission to succeed. It’s about creating a world where women can thrive without apology, where their expertise is recognized, their voices are heard, and their contributions are celebrated.

Since that evening, I have carried that fire with me. I’ve mentored younger students, advocated for policies that promote equality and shared not just my story but the stories of countless others. Every time I take the stage, I remember that night—and I remember that my voice, our voices, have the power to change the very landscape of medicine. It’s not just a personal mission—it’s a collective one, shared by every woman who has ever been overlooked and every woman who will ever rise in her place.

I don’t believe in waiting for change to happen. Change is something you fight for, every day, in every moment. And I will continue to fight—for gender equity, for opportunity, for the women who came before me and the women who will follow. Because I know that when one of us rises, we all rise. And together, we will shape the future of medicine—not as survivors, but as warriors.