

IWD 2021 – Different Day Same Problem Transcript

[00:00:02] This podcast is brought to you by the University of Aberdeen.

Professor Mirela Delibegovic [00:00:10] Good evening, everyone, and welcome to the International Women's Day discussion on different day, same problem. My name is Mirela Delibegovic and I'm the Dean for Industrial Engagement and Research and Knowledge Transfer at the University of Aberdeen. As part of the International Women's Day and British Science Week programme of events, this panel discussion with successful women researchers and a leading public health experts will discuss the challenges they face in their everyday lives and their extraordinary careers.

[00:00:42] But before we start, just a little bit of background about International Women's Day itself. International Women's Day has been celebrated across the world since the early nineteenth hundreds, originally, the aim was to provide a forum for women to campaign for gender equality and women's rights. Over time, it has evolved. And now on the 8th of March, every year thousands of events are held throughout the world to recognise the progress that has been made to inspire women and to celebrate their achievements. The theme for this year is #ChooToChallenge. This is quite an appropriate one this year, especially in light of all the things that have happened since March 2020. A challenged world is an alert world. Individually, we are all responsible for our own thoughts and our own actions all day and every day. We can all choose to challenge and call our gender bias and inequality. We can all choose to seek out and celebrate women's achievements, and collectively we can all help create an inclusive world. From challenge comes change. So let's all choose the challenge. Now let me introduce you to our panel of four outstanding and inspirational women. Professor Lesley Anderson, Ms Jillian Evans, Dr Katherine Martin and Dr. Soumya Palliyil. Maybe we can go in this order and you can just tell us a bit about yourselves and what you do in your everyday job. Thank you.

Professor Lesley Anderson [00:02:24] Hello and welcome. I'm Professor Lesley Anderson, I am co-director of the Aberdeen Centre for Health Data Science at the University of Aberdeen and a Professor of health data science. Most of my research involves cancer, looking for improved diagnostics, but also to improve patient outcomes and reduce the risk of people developing cancer. I work with researchers around the globe, including the US and Australia, but also in many low and middle income countries in Africa and across Asia. We'd like to take this opportunity to thank everyone for attending today, and I'm looking forward to participating in the panel discussion. Thank you.

Dr Jillian Evans [00:03:07] Hi, everybody. I'm Jillian Evans and I'm from NHS Grampian, and it's a real pleasure and privilege to be here today. I started a very long career in health care management in England a long time ago, too long ago to even remember, in fact. But it's been a wonderful, wonderful career. I wouldn't swap my job for anything. And my job at the moment is very much around health intelligence and has been for over 20 years now. So, Lesley, your work in data science and our work in the health intelligence team in NHS company does so much with the University of Aberdeen and health data, and we're so happy about that collaboration, which is strengthened so much, particularly in the last year. So it's a real positive. Like Lesley I've done work in other countries in the UK, but also abroad too, in Nigeria and India, and it's been a real pleasure to be part of other health systems and the different way in which they function and the outcomes which they all seek to attain, which are very similar, of course, to ours. Another another point to mention is my work in the voluntary sector where I work with a with a with SHMU, for those of you who are local to Aberdeen is all about helping people build confidence, their skills, young

people and old people. It's about employability and recognition of people who have had a difficult start in life. And it's all about digital media. So that's that's a great thing for me. But my last thing is just to mention the work that I've done in the past year and throughout the pandemic, which, of course, has been very health intelligence related, but it's also been very communication oriented. And I've spent quite a bit of time communicating about the situation of the pandemic, both in the local situation and across Scotland. And it's been a pleasure and a privilege to do that. So I hope I can contribute something today and that over to the next person. Thank you.

Dr Kathryn Martin [00:05:11] So I think that's myself, I have to say that I'm quite honoured to be here today, and so thank you very much for having me. My name is Kathryn Martin. I'm a lecturer of epidemiology within the Institute of Applied Health Sciences at the University of Aberdeen. And I lead a programme of research that's focussed on physical activity, particularly amongst older adults, those individuals with arthritis and musculoskeletal conditions and chronic pain. And one other area that I'm particularly passionate about is patients lived experience of their chronic condition, of their pain, and I work closely with patients and members of the public to involve them in research from idea generation, grants submission to carrying out actual research activities, and trying to bring the findings back to the individuals who have taken part in the research to understand and make sense of that data and then work with them to share the results more broadly rather than only just in publications and journals, but to actually do wider public engagement events about that research. And so you can tell from my accent, I'm not native to Aberdeen. I was born just outside of Boston, Massachusetts, and I will just say that I have really enjoyed working at the University of Aberdeen. I continue to collaborate with individuals back in the United States and further afield in other other countries, much like my colleagues and I would say that I've gotten where I am today, in large part due to support from teachers and mentors who really encouraged preparation and perseverance is key to success. So I think today's conversation will be really exciting because many of those individuals were women, some really, really wonderful women. Thank you.

Dr Soumya Palliyil [00:07:01] OK, so my name is Soumya Palliyil, and I am so honoured and delighted to be here today as a member, and so I am the Head of Scottish Biologics Facility, which is a drug discovery centre. In the Scottish Biologics Facility we develop recombinant antibodies and develop them into Northern Diagnostics and therapeutics, in my role in the facility is mainly to manage these projects and also engage with collaborators and potential customers and develop new projects applying for grant funding, and also something which is really passionate about is training the next generation of antibodies, ideas and technologies. So some of the projects that I lead in the facility include antibody based diagnostics and new treatments for Alzheimer's disease. Also looking at Nova therapeutic options for bacterial and fungal infections. And this is mainly antimicrobial resistance as part of the with Covid-19 pandemic, we were also involved in making diagnostic antibodies and develop test kits with detection. And it's not just in drug discovery that we use uses antibodies. We make antibody based tests for tackling environmental issues, such as making test kits for detecting viral toxins in water samples in tropical countries, and also products such as shellfish, meat in UK farms. Another product which is very close to my heart, is to use these antibodies to reduce fatalities associated with the snake bite and venom in countries like India and Africa. And I'm very proud to say that in response to biologics specifically, which is a team of 11 scientists, including pgr students and post doc, we then send them to seven different countries other than the UK, and we bring in our own life experiences, our own problem solving skills onto the table. And that's something that I'm very proud of and passionate about. And as you can understand from my accent, I'm not from the UK. I spend my childhood and early

years of higher education in India. I came to Aberdeen to do my master's and I love it here. I never left Aberdeen since then and I'm really looking forward to this. Thank you.

Professor Mirela Delibegovic [00:09:32] Thank you so much. And these are really four different inspirational stories. So as I said, please post any questions you have for the panellists. But I thought I would start off by just asking a very general question on how you got to where you are today. How did you become the leader in your field? And I was just wondering whether you can tell us a little bit about the barriers you may have encountered and how you overcame these. So maybe if we can actually start with Soumya, if you don't mind your experiences things.

Dr Soumya Palliyil [00:10:07] Yeah, great question about some of the barriers that I faced was the ones that I created myself, after my PhD I got this fantastic opportunity to be part of the team to set up the Scottish Biologics Facility and work on antibody projects. However, after having my first child, like most women, I also went into this stagnant phase in my career, mainly because of the fact that I was so convinced that this little person came into my life is completely dependent on me. And as a mother I should be tending to each and every need. I wouldn't trust my husband to look after her even for an evening. So that means I would just like go into the lab, do my work come home, no additional training, no conferences or networking, that was how I was. But things changed when we had our second born, actually a set of twins. And at this stage I had to let my husband get involved. And actually he was quite good at it. I did much better than how I thought. And I also want to be satisfied by my lack of progress in my career and with this kind of newfound trust in my husband that I don't have to venture out to get out there for conferences, network and speak to collaborators, they let develop new projects and build a team. So that was fantastic for me, and that's how that kind of progress, and another one I really wanted to add quickly was another barrier I found was the lack of mentors, you know who are more appropriate for somebody like me who came into the country and wanted to kind of establish a career in biotech, I mean, I was surrounded by talented, ambitious women during my PhD, my early postdoc don't get me wrong, it's just that I couldn't relate to most of them because their career, the journey that they took was different from what I had to do. So I found that quite difficult to relate to those kind of stories, little more than a couple. And let us know what kind of training opportunities like the Aurora, I mean, I am in touch with a lot of wonderful women coming from diverse backgrounds, and, you know, we are able to kind of share their experiences, the challenges that we face and we are all learning from each other successful. So that's a couple of barriers that I thought but I faced on it.

Professor Mirela Delibegovic [00:12:40] And just get to wondering so this is a slightly different perspective maybe from from Jillian is a public health expert. What kind of barriers you will have encountered in your journey?

Dr Jillian Evans [00:12:53] You know, I mean, the NHS is the most amazing place to work, and I've worked in that long time and I've been afforded all sorts of freedoms and latitude to be able to bring things to the fore. I feel strongly about so of course, my job is around data and around intelligence. And I get passionate like all of us and trying to communicate that. And I think I think the main thing that I've been able to do is to bring to bring a style of communication which seems to work. Maybe it simplifies things for people. I don't know. But I think that's why I've got here today, and especially over the last year, where I may have not been so prominent as I have been. So I think communication has really helped. Barriers, the biggest barrier I face, I think I think is an opportunity for coming out of this pandemic has been where we live and our ability to influence things at a Scottish national level and an English national level, let alone on a global level. But

certainly in our country where a lot of the NHS influence seems to occur in a central belt. And because of the way that we where we live, we're remote because there hasn't been a lot of opportunity for remote working until the last year. It's been really difficult to raise the profile and importance of the north east of Scotland. So I'm optimistic that as we emerge from this that we will have found a new way of working that allows us to engage in no matter where we are, and when we start to think about employment opportunities and bringing in fresh blood to the north east of Scotland, imagine us and the NHS employing someone in Australia or India and not having to live in our country necessarily to do that. I think it forces so many great opportunities. So I think the barrier that was there in terms of influence is gradually changing. And I really welcome that.

Professor Mirela Delibegovic [00:14:54] That's wonderful. Thank you. And Lesley, do you have more to add to this? I'm sure you have plenty.

Professor Lesley Anderson [00:15:01] Yes, absolutely. And I thought Jillian and Soumya both highlighted really resonates with me as well. I did my initial career in Queens University, Belfast from Northern Ireland. So, again, I'm not Scottish, I'm Northern Irish and I moved to the U.S. for two years to do a post-doctoral fellowship after I finished my PhD. And I really think that that was the trajectory start of my career. So working with international renowned researchers at the National Cancer Institute in the US really facilitated my networking, getting to know people and then coming back to Northern Ireland. It left those existing relationships that Kathryn has already highlighted where you can continue to work on an international scale and an international capacity. And that was one of the real highlights of my career. I think that that really moved things forward. And the other aspect was, so I have three children, I have a six, a nine and a twelve year old. And that has been a real challenge and a challenge to the career because it was you were starting off, you were stopping as you were pregnant. You were trying to get back on that trajectory. And then I was finding out I was pregnant again. So I think that that was that was a real challenge. And I think it definitely did delay the steps forward in the career. But as Soumya said once, once the children were born and things opened up and I felt I was able to travel again. The career has really sped up again and over the last year with covid has been a real challenge, particularly with home schooling. And I'm sure many of the women and men who are on the call today and everyone has had impacts either with caring responsibilities or with home education. So my son has had no home education today, my husband has been working, I have been working all day, and so he'll be doing his home schooling at the weekend. And we've had to try and find ways around that. Thankfully, the schools have been incredibly supportive, but it's definitely been a real challenge, continuing to work full time with those responsibilities as well. And I'm sure many of the audience will be able to relate to that.

Professor Mirela Delibegovic [00:17:36] Absolutely. How about you, Kathryn? I guess you will have also, as you said, come from from the United States, you will have faced a lot of different bodies now.

Dr Kathryn Martin [00:17:49] So. So for me, I would say that what really has enhanced and been supportive has been those strong role models for mentors and folks that have been in my life that actually have provided opportunities or sort of pointed me in directions. But much like Soumya, I also feel like sometimes I have been my own barrier and and yes, moving internationally. I made two international moves, one from Bethesda, Maryland to London and then back to Maryland. And then so is actually maybe three international moves, if you will, in the space of about three years back and forth, back and forth. And so it's starting over and finding those new networks and the people that are supportive and

and just who to go to, who to ask for help. And so I was saying that getting in your own way sometimes, I think can be an issue, finding that you can ask people for help, being able to delegate and then finding that trust and being able to have those good working relationships sometimes I think is of utmost importance. So for me, I would also say and this may be some other people's experience that are listening, but imposter syndrome is something that women struggle with, and that is something that I have actually had to really think about work on and again and really be supported by wonderful other women. And and I think that's something that's quite important for us to be remembering when we're not together. That's a huge barrier as well. I think we're getting some questions coming in on the chat, by the way.

Professor Mirela Delibegovic [00:19:31] Thank you. So actually, I will go to Jennifer Fernande's question, if that's OK. And the question is, how do we encourage females to stay in academia when so many feel that they hit the wall of caring responsibilities and the juggling just becomes too much? Maybe, maybe. Soumya would you like to start with that one?

Dr Soumya Palliyil [00:19:55] Sure. So I think it's it is difficult to do so when you are when you realise the caring, no matter what it is It's just the way we are wired, and I don't mean to say anatomically, but this is what we were brought up, the rules that you would expect us to do. So it means that we take the brunt, the domestic chores or to take responsibility for that. So I think it's all it's how you how you get through this as an individual, how you can kind of find your own path to take your career forward. In my case, I kind of want to do the work and my partner does the caring responsibilities and just want to be just between us we we share that. And also start thinking about what is the next phase that you need to do, what is the next step that you need to take in your career. So for me personally, this pandemic has been quite productive and everybody like I got the space to reflect upon to think about what what is the next step that I need to take for that career move and a bit of training, getting involved in training or setting up a network of collaborators so that those things kind of draw a map of what you need to do and then take that step one by one and make your own path, what I have to I have to say, from my experience,.

Professor Mirela Delibegovic [00:21:40] I mean, it's an interesting question that Soumya brings up, because I'm just thinking about people in academia affects us. But, yesterday I saw a report that the same issue faces women in law. And the report this morning, the same issue faces women in business. Do you think this pandemic is kind of uncovered deeper inequalities and this is the subject of today's discussion, this inequalities, and that women are a lot more affected by the current epidemic and kind of the nature of our jobs and nature of our contacts. What do you think, Jillian?

Dr Jillian Evans [00:22:15] I mean, very much so. It's it's it's well, it's well discussed now to the issue of work life balance, the home schooling, the child care, the caring responsibilities, the domestic chores that Soumya was talking about, alot of it feels as if it falls to us, if I'm honest, sometimes I quite like the mix, and isn't it interesting, and I noticed that Louise and the chat said something, maybe the system needs to change rather than we need to change. But it's a bit of both isn't it? I mean, the inequalities are deep seated we know that they're there and we know that the different positions that women have in society, in their careers, not just in STEM, but in all walks of life, mean that there are deep rooted inequalities there. But I just wonder if there's something changing in society about is the 24/7 culture, isn't it? So, Lesley, you mentioned your son is going to be homeschooled at the weekend, so the weekend is a school day. So my work is often very late at night or very early in the morning, but typically not a nine to five. So I think I think

the traditional structures that we've had in place are definitely changing. They were going that way anyway. But but yes, to get back to the inequality question, I completely agree with that and if anything, what the pandemic has done is to shine a light, really to expose the inequalities that are there in our lives. And I feel so incredibly passionate about them, particularly when I think of my own kids actually, who are older but still going through the education system. I worry about their inequality, what's happening to them, and they're in a good place. They've got a good home, a home set up that should make them thrive, but the system isn't letting them do that. And then the quality of students coming through, isn't there, who have who have been disadvantaged through the situation. So I'm not giving any advice, just I'm really just sympathising with it and acknowledging it now.

Professor Mirela Delibegovic [00:24:20] Thank you. So Kathryn, what do you think of going back to Jenny's question? How do we encourage females to just stick with and stay in academia?

Dr Kathryn Martin [00:24:29] Well, I think that we have been seeing more recently, particularly for women, that they are in positions that are maybe not full time, that sometimes being at a lower percentage, not a full time, brings with it a little bit more of a precarious nature. And actually, if they are in that child care caregiving roles, they may be unable to actually do some of the extra work or just even do their work during work hours. We've seen reports of unequal submission of manuscripts for review scientific journals during the pandemic. That was something that was flagged really earlier. So more men were being noted that they were lead or senior author on some of these papers. So maybe suggesting that men were finding time to get these papers, their unfinished projects done. And I think that women in Academia are facing a lot more of these higher demands and an area where it's really an insecure future, whereas fewer core funded positions, things are if they are made available, they especially for early career researchers, they're either part time or short term contracts. And I think that there's even fewer of these positions and more applicants. And so people have to start to really distinguish themselves on their CV's. So things like any sort of prizes and scholarships and internships and early publications and I mean the sort of any sort of employment history, all of that feeds into this and inequality's start from childhood. So if you are not able to access those opportunities, then you may miss out. So we talk about that leaky pipeline, I think, and where people start to drop out and the numbers. And I think that that's something that's really been highlighted by a colleague who gave me some numbers, if you don't mind me, just giving some stats. Approximately twenty one thousand professors in the UK and only one hundred and forty of these at a sort of professorial level identified as black. So that's the zero point seven percent of those tools. Twenty one percent. So there is this leaky pipeline, especially for people of of BAME and also for women, because male professors continue to outnumber females by about three to one. So thank you, Dr Polly, very much appreciated for those statistics.

Professor Mirela Delibegovic [00:27:11] I think that's great that you've actually done that. And if Lesley doesn't mind, I've want to take this forward to her, as Lesley, you have made it to this beautiful professorial position. But do you think that really the hardest part is for people at early stages in their careers? And I wanted to build on what Kathryn had just brought up we will see the Australian government's report about the specific issues that affect people from diverse backgrounds, that there are barriers to entry and barriers to retention as well as progression, especially in the STEM workforce. What's your thinking about how this could be improved? What we can do to help it?

Professor Lesley Anderson [00:27:57] So absolutely, Kathryn, I think it is very challenging for for women to get professorial positions and I certainly face challenges with that, having applied locally for promotions. And every time I applied, they said, well, you're doing great, but you just need to try a bit harder and you just need to bring in some more money and you just need to get some more publications. And you just need to work with people on an international basis more. And you need to do this and this and this. And many of the things that I was being asked to do were prohibited or prohibitive for me because of the fact that I had a young family, for example. I didn't want to be working or travelling on an international scale at that time. So I do understand and relate to the fact that many women, once they start having families and that they have children, it becomes incredibly difficult. And I remember whenever I went back to the US and I met with a colleague and she said, when should I start having my family? I said, well, let's put it this way. I never feel as if I'm being as good a mum as I should be because I'm working and I never feel as if I'm doing as good a work as I'm doing because I'm a mother and I have to make those changes and those those adaptations. But that's exactly what you have to do. I think if you're wanting to continue within any career and be a parent, you need to make those changes and those modifications and realise we're never 100 percent of what we wish that we could be, even if we don't have children. So I think that everybody just has to take that acceptance that you try and you work your best, but you don't you don't ever reach those goals of what you're what you're expecting that you should be at. I think the real challenge that we see is that many of the inequalities that do occur often occur as a within the factors, and that's as Kathryn saying that many people with different racial perspectives, different of different races, or maybe have a different perspective from a religious perspective, and that was certainly something in Northern Ireland that that we faced and can have challenges, and what I would also like to reiterate is that the challenges that I faced, I think, were really I was given a lot of support by female role models as as has been highlighted by some of the other panel members. And if you haven't had a female mentor, it's certainly something that I think women should look for and should ask. I'm more than happy to mentor any female or just have a chat with any female who feels that they would like or would value or would have a benefit from that support. And I think that it's also taking an understanding that you might slow your career down during those early years of whenever your children are young, you never get those years back again. And I'm having children crying now outside the room, just to show that this is real life. So it is it is completely normal and it is possible to come back and and to really move your career on after taking that time out of the career. So I think it is really important, we do not want to lose female females in academia and certainly in science and as we move forward. And so it's also really and I've seen a huge benefit having moved to the University of Aberdeen with regards to the support network that is available and that I have been benefited from over the last year, and, you know, even just giving three extra days rest days over Easter, getting the additional rest days of Christmas, those types of things that the organisations are taking on board and providing have been incredibly supportive and helpful, not just for females, but for the entire workforce. And I think it's just really important to commend researchers over the last year, despite all of the challenges that we faced, we have been able to continue the research, we've been able to continue to produce publications, we've been able to do all of those things. But as Kathryn was saying, I haven't got to have any of my publications, I'm home schooling whenever I'm outside of my meetings and outside of the other responsibilities. So I think from my perspective, it's just being realistic as to what you can achieve and you can do and to have a balance between work and your home life, which is crucially important.

Professor Mirela Delibegovic [00:33:13] That's wonderful. Thank you, Lesley. And just going through an audience questions, it's a really good one from Liz Rattray, that thing

you've just touched upon that, Lesley. So I was just wondering if I could ask Soumya about this. Would you encourage identifying a mentor? And how has this helped in your career development?

Dr Soumya Palliyil [00:33:32] Absolutely. So I think it was mentorship, I mean, I'll maybe briefly catch you up on my personal experience, this is when I kind of realised more needs to be done in my career when I had a female, sort of mentor that time into the school we had an immediate line manager then you would be relocated to a different manager. So I had a female line manager, like a mentor to me. And it's just, you know, so that's when the meetings that I had with her that kind of really like started this discussion for sure that I needed to be doing some more in my career and look at opportunities etc. So absolutely having a mentor and in my experience, having a female mentor will definitely help us to kind of have an extra progressing career. It's mainly because, you know, this is somebody who you can look upon them, but also sometimes you just a pat on your back saying that you're doing wonderful. So it's just that I of times that I doubt myself, I think you should be questioning my abilities and my doing that, I think is this. But to have somebody like a mentor telling you that this is what you're doing, you're doing a wonderful job, you all need that, but that imposter syndrome thinking, well, am I eligible to be doing something like this to have a mentor? It's really important. Also, I would add to that having some sort of like an advocate responsible for people who can give it all up in the women to take up leadership roles, senior roles. But we need to have people around us who can advocate for us, who can trust in us, and then give us these kind of high responsibility jobs that will also help women and the need to kind of close that inequality in high senior roles. At the moment, I think we're still trying to close that gap. So the mentor and sponsor is what I would say, definitely.

Professor Mirela Delibegovic [00:35:49] I'm just wondering if either of the panel members, if any of you have not had a mentor and got to where you are today, or have you all have the mentor, this kind of help to through the process. I can see lots of nodding here, maybe, Kathryn, you want to tell us about this?

Dr Kathryn Martin [00:36:09] I've been extremely fortunate, I think, in all different parts of my educational process, I mean, even if you look back, you might have had a teacher in elementary school that was supportive or encouraging and pointed you in the direction of things that they thought would allow your talents to shine. As an undergraduate, I was fortunate to be mentored by Professor Thompson, and he encouraged me and sort of gave me, I think, the sort of help to spark my passion and research and said, yeah, come on, I'm doing a summer project. Do you want to do some research? And is being offered that opportunity and being trusted with that was really something special, especially as an undergraduate, to sort of foster that and build those skills and resources. Again, that's where the opportunities come in and then things sort of continue and grow because you have it on your CV, you have that confidence and you have that mentor to go to for questions and all throughout I've had other wonderful female mentors, and I would have to say that along the way you might come across someone and you think they would be a really great mentor, really nice fit. But you also have to remember it's about relationships and that level of trust and a level of where values lie as well. So wanting to make sure, I suppose, that you see in that person the person you would like to become, because there's all sorts of types of researchers and people that are involved in the work that we do in academia. And so finding someone that you think, OK, they have a strong character, they have a good sense of justice and fairness and I guess mentors that will help bring out the best in you in a very selfless way, I think is really an important component. And I was fortunate and still am. And I think sometimes you have mentors at different parts of your

life and you might still keep in contact with them, but they're not the right person for the situation you're in currently. And so you find those people and you seek them out when you need them. And I think that's, again, about finding the trust, having the relationships and being able to put your hand up and say, look, I need a little bit of help here. What do you think is best for me or what would you have done in this situation? I think makes a world of difference.

Professor Mirela Delibegovic [00:38:28] I think that's a great point to bring up Kathryn, that at different points in life you require a different type of mentorship and you kind of keep those previous mentors as your friends and allies. I was wondering whether we can discuss one of the questions that Karl Leydecker has posted in the chat. What would make the biggest difference in responding to the gender inequalities caused by Covid and Jillian to seeing me kind of looking ahead? I was just wondering if you could give us your opinion on this one.

Dr Jillian Evans [00:38:59] I mean, some of it is just about policies, whether they're set politically, nationally, or whether they're set by your own organisation. So it's people with women's perspectives on things that can really make a difference. And what we know is that a lot of the policies really have made it difficult for women to keep on working and juggle the responsibilities. But imagine some of the policies around childcare and caring responsibilities have been quite different to the start. I think that would have I think policies would have made a huge difference. The other thing is how your organisation copes. And we're chatting around culture in our organisation all the way through, aren't we? I think I do think it makes a difference who you're working for and not just at the top of your organisation filtering all the way through. So how? Well, I mean, Soumya you mentioned about line management, the importance of working with your boss and your immediate colleagues is really important. And so informal things can make a huge difference, that they can cut you the slack, that you might need to be able to get things finished or coping strategies, support, confidence building, all of that kind of thing. So so policies and practises, I think, are the things that we should focus on at every level and every walk in our life.

Professor Mirela Delibegovic [00:40:28] Thank you. I think that's that's a really good answer. I was wondering what I can ask Lesley a slightly different question. It's one that we've touched upon previously, but the imposter syndrome and I see the Margaret Rosses also ask this one. So the imposter syndrome and guilt feel like a huge part of being a working woman and the mother. How much do we know about the men feel the same way and what is to be learnt from male mentors? So kind of going back to talking about mentorship again.

Professor Lesley Anderson [00:41:00] Absolutely. And I don't think that a mentor necessarily needs to be a woman. I have come through my career with some fantastic line managers who have been nothing but supportive. I remember whenever I had my second child, I was breastfeeding and I wanted to come back to work. But he refused to take a bottle so he would starve all day and just want to feed at night time. And my boss, I spoke to him and said, look, I really don't think I can come back in the capacity that I'm at, and they said, that's fine, just bring him with you, and I said, I can't bring my child to work with me. And he said, I have no problem with them sitting in your office if you're happy to bring him in. And so my son came in and he came in and he was he was a great baby and he was able to get hooked on to the desk and a little chair, and I gave him things to play with, and he came to the lunch table and got hooked on at the lunch table. I think things have changed and from an insurance perspective and ect, and ensuring that there's no

harm, and that probably has changed from it from an organisational perspective, whether or not you can support that. But those types of understanding from male line managers, male mentors was really important for me at that stage of my career and also at the organisation that I was at previously we had a formal mentorship procedure and that was really helpful because that enabled me to meet with females at a higher grade and a higher level within the university and also to then go to senior meetings, for example, and be a bit like a fly on the wall. And that really helped, and one of the other things that I think really helped deviating from your question, but one of the other things that I really think helped with my career trajectory was the opportunity to be able to take a leadership training programme that lasted over a nine month period. And following that then went into a leadership role as deputy director of the cancer registry in Northern Ireland, where I was overseeing and managing twenty five individuals. So those types of opportunities, of course, and of development opportunities were really crucially important in my confidence. I think I can do this and as well as also giving me the opportunity to be able to understand how to manage other people. So those those are things that I think are important for organisations to be able to provide the opportunities for women and men to take advantage of training that will help them and support them in moving to the next career step.

Professor Mirela Delibegovic [00:44:11] I think that's a really good answer, and actually, I remember when I first started at University of Aberdeen, which is in 2007, I didn't have a nursery spot yet. So I came to my first day at work with the buggy and a three month old baby as well. That was in the Zoology building. I'm not sure that they check the insurance at the time. And I should also mention that the University of Aberdeen, for those who are here from the university, does have a mentoring scheme, which works really well from my understanding, and part of it as well. But also for those who are not part of the University of Aberdeen today there are also a number of national and international mentoring schemes that you can take part in, and I've taken part in those and they are absolutely fantastic. But I think what you brought about the leadership and and the opportunities for leadership kind of training and opening up that thought and leaving the door open is really important and kind of fits in with the question that was going to ask from Janine Chalmers. And this is going to be to Soumya. And so we are often told that women have less confidence than men and that the kind of hang back more and don't apply for promotion. Is this your experience? And if so, what changes should organisations or universities make to their people policies to ensure that talent isn't lost or left behind? So Soumya, this one is for you.

Dr Soumya Palliyil [00:45:36] For sure. I think from my experience, I don't know. I mean, we constantly hear this thing from other people saying that, you know, men always apply for a job when they think that maybe 50 percent ready, whereas women wait until they are two hundred plus and they're still thinking over there that I know. Absolutely. From my experience, yes women lack confidence than men have been trying to achieve their goals. And I think the question is more about what Universities should change their policies so that talent isn't lost. So, again, to have creating a support network for women that they can they could be kind of uplifted at the same level and also senior roles within the university to kind of constantly reminding women just like the wonderful job they're doing, juggling the caring responsibilities. So that is absolutely important. And also, I don't know, I mean, this might be a bit longer then, but the promotions criteria, you know, whether we should be revisiting some of these, like Lesley touched upon this earlier, a lot of cases where we always asked to go back and do more. And so somebody told me that you saw just about how would you do your job? Are you ready for the next moment that you apply for? That is more important in promotions is what initially I was a bit shocked to hear, but I was quite

naive at that stage. But that's that's how things work. No matter how good you do, that is your job. So that's why you need to do the more trade that you're ready for the next level. So I don't know whether we need to be reconsidering that, because certainly in the industry that I had a little bit of experience working in industry as part of my PhD and they're doing a fantastic job. Obviously, you get promoted to the if you are a scientist who could become a senior scientist and so on. But a university of academia is different. So whether we should be kind of revisiting that might be it's not as easy I'm saying this, but that's my my opinion, humble opinion.

Professor Mirela Delibegovic [00:48:05] I don't know if it's just academia, just different cultures doing things differently. I remember one of my US colleagues telling me that when she first started as an assistant professor, she got three grants immediately and had her heads of department come along and said, well, you've done really well, you know, so we are going to give you a pay rise without actually applying for it. So I guess in UK things may be a little bit different than academia, a little bit differently. So maybe that's what mentoring comes into play. Really still kind of encouraging a mentors that help you build that career. Kathryn I wonder whether we can pick up on the question from Grace Law, who's asked, what advice would you give to women to feel more empowered and appreciated at work?

Dr Kathryn Martin [00:48:47] That's a good question. So let us see what advice when I give to women to feel more empowered and appreciated at work. I think the first way to sort of feel more empowered and appreciated is to actually reflect on what it is that you've accomplished and actually start there first because, I think it's important for us to recognise how much we've achieved and how much we do without maybe looking for that to come from an external source. So I think actually, if you stop and you consider everything you have done to that point and how much you've achieved in comparison to many others at a similar level or whatnot, I think that's one way to actually say, yeah, actually I have done an awful lot. So if you've had a week or you think I'm not accomplished anything, you stop and actually think about what you've done. So, you know, I've done a lot. And I think in terms of feeling appreciated at work, I think that that's more about the people around us and the culture to be able to say to one another. Thank you so much for that. I recognise that I've asked you for something and you've made that a priority for me. So I think we receive appreciation. We also give it we start to create that culture of the organisation within the university and academia of actually recognising how we work together. And then so if you give you get and I think that's really important. And in terms of feeling empowered, I think it's about recognising that we all have unique strengths and talents and putting ourselves forward. We need to make sure that we are putting our hands up. So there's an interesting statistics, I was thinking about all these things you hear over the years, but men are more likely to put their hands up to say, yes, I'll take the chair position. So it is a committee and all of you saying, OK, we need a new chair. Men will put their hand up and say, I'll be that chair, whereas women won't necessarily. So I think we need to be empowered to speak up in meetings to acknowledge one another's contributions and to actually then put ourselves forward for those roles because someone else will, and then they'll delegated the work to you.

Professor Mirela Delibegovic [00:51:02] So we're kind of running out of time. And I really want to squeeze in just one more quick quick question, if that's OK for Lesley. And so a lots of this. So this is from Naomi. A lot of this is around Fix the Women, what's about the importance of the leadership function, about the feedback, transparency, clarity and accountability?

Professor Lesley Anderson [00:51:23] Absolutely. I think that is crucially important and I think that women often don't ask for feedback. I think that that's been something that I've always been very open and receptive to as I've moved through the career, giving and receiving feedback, asking for that and ensuring that I have it. I have three children outside the door here making such a racket. So apologies. I do think that women need to be empowered as they're moving through their career. And I think that's one of the most important things, is that I think we often forget to tell individuals and it's not isolated to telling women, but just to tell people as they're going through their career, you're really doing a good job or this is how you could do it better. These are the things that you need in moving forward. And I know that there were some people were asking there. So there was an individual on the chat was asking, how can I be a good mentor? I've been recommended as being a mentor. How can I be good? Well, I think the most important thing is being honest and open. And we all have experiences where we have identified and we have faced really difficult situations and it's being open and honest about those. And I think that this has been a great opportunity for all of us to do that. I think also moving on from this, it's ensuring that women do feel empowered, that they can they can take on the chair position on a committee, that they can take on these other responsibilities, even if they have families and they have other things that they have to do afterwards. But all of this is really important that we ensure that women are given these the opportunities, the same opportunities as men, but that we are given the opportunities and also that we take those. So I think a lot of the reasons why women don't look at moving forward to the next position is because they think that I've got enough going on now. And so I think that a lot of those opportunities and those barriers that we face are put up by ourselves. And so it is breaking down those barriers. And I think one of the best things that I've identified through the Covid pandemic, I love working from home. I love being here, although I forgot my child as well to pick her up today, and so she walked down the lane herself, I was on a meeting and missed track of time, she worked on the lane herself, it's not a very far, so she's fine, but she's six years old and giving her the strength to be able to do that. I felt like a terrible mother today, not doing schoolwork and not picking my child up from the top of the road. But these are these are things that we face as we move forward in our careers. And I think it's really important that we face these, but that we move on from them as well.

Professor Lesley Anderson [00:54:40] So I would like to thank everyone who's attended today. I'm sure there are many other questions that we have not been able to address and to be able to assist with. I am available if anybody wants to get in touch and I'm sure the other panel members would be in the same capacity. We have incredibly busy calendars with our work requirements, but we're also I'm also open to having a chat with people outside of that, if it could help them in their career development.

Professor Mirela Delibegovic [00:55:17] Thank you so much, Lesley. So this really leaves me. Exactly. You can just stolen my bits, but thank you so much for that introduction. I'd just like to thank our panellists, first of all, for the stimulating discussion. And I just wonder whether we can just do a little rounds of applause in our own offices, rooms, whatever houses. Thank you so much. I found this very stimulating, but I would also like to thank our audience for joining us tonight to posing such challenging questions. And I think it's quite obvious we're all in the same boat and people are looking for solutions and looking for leaders to kind of give us an insight how we could change things. And I do hope you've enjoyed tonight's events and that you'll be able to join a number of the other events that get organised by the University of Aberdeen team and those running throughout this whole week. And finally, I would also like to thank the engagement team behind the scenes who put this all together to allow us to choose to challenge. So thank you, everybody, and I hope you have a great evening. Good night.

[00:56:24] This podcast is brought to you by the University of Aberdeen.