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Together Towards a Modern Future

Women in Surgery Switzerland



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In February 2023, a small group from the Department of Visceral Surgery at USZ spontaneously organized a meeting for female surgeons. The agenda initially focused on presenting the career path of an experienced surgeon, followed by a presentation of the career goals of a surgical candidate. This led to an inspiring exchange, followed by very positive feedback.



Subsequent meetings included more participants from across Switzerland,

and the idea of founding an association began to take shape in a social setting. Following the examples of similar organizations in other countries – such as [die Chirurginnen](#) in Germany, [Women in Surgery Italia](#), [Women in Surgery](#) in the UK – we took action. On 27.09.2023, we officially founded the first association for female surgeons in Switzerland. The name "Women in Surgery Switzerland" was established by the end of 2023. Thanks to broad support through [Crowdfunding](#), we reached our self-set startup capital by early 2024 and launched our online presence with www.womeninsurgery.ch. Without this virtual business card, advertising, memberships, and spreading our mission would not be possible. We [celebrated](#) our website and social media presence in style. The momentum following the association's founding showed us that we were filling an important gap. We were immediately able to present ourselves to the surgical umbrella organizations, give lectures at inter-cantonal lecture series, and were invited to the [SCS Congress](#) with a booth.

These activities allowed us to reflect, discuss, refine, and occasionally reconsider our goals, core values, and projects. Despite the numerous positive feedback and support, we also encountered critical questions along the way. Therefore, we are grateful to use the "Swiss Knife" as a national platform to present our mission here.

Mission

In many surgical disciplines, women are still underrepresented in leadership positions – despite the consistently high proportion of female medical graduates for decades. Particularly in career development, the saying "It's not what you know, but who you know" plays a significant role. In surgery, where practical skills must be learned in close collaboration with supervisors, a lack of "[high-status connections](#)" (career-boosting network contacts) can be a challenge. Studies show that women leave a less lasting impression in interactions with potentially career-advancing supervisors compared to men. Why is this the case?

Assertiveness and self-confidence are traditionally seen as key indicators of competence and potential in personal interactions – traits culturally associated with masculine behavior. When women display these traits, they risk being perceived as too pushy. As a result, it can be more difficult for women to build sustainable professional relationships compared to their male colleagues – they are either seen as less competent or too demanding.

Men, on the other hand, tend to benefit more from personal interactions with senior colleagues. Women, however, are about one-third more likely than men to form high-level connections through third parties. **Therefore, women should strategically leverage the power of mutual networks and connections!**

Our mission is to network female surgeons. We regularly organize events where participants can meet informally, exchange ideas, and get to know each other. In March, we held our first event in French-speaking Switzerland, where, staying true to our founding idea, an experienced surgeon (Prof. [Jocelyne Bloch](#), Neurosurgery Lausanne) shared her career and research journey, and two young surgical senior residents described their daily routines and career planning.

Another pillar of our mission is visibility. We want to give female surgeons a face. By making female surgeons more visible, we show what is possible – and that diversity and equal opportunities can only be guaranteed if we all

work together. In 2024, we started the 'Role Models' project with [Dr. med. M. Biraima](#) and [Dr. med. B. Muff](#), and we will continue it in the current year. A mentoring program based on the [Senior-Mentor:innen Programm](#) of the Medical University of Vienna is in the planning stages and will be accessible to association members.

Our third pillar is change – we aim to help break down old structures and pave the way for new ones, such as in the work-life balance. We want to contribute to modernizing our profession and making it more attractive to the next generation. We [address issues](#) and work together with you and the surgical umbrella organizations to find solutions. This includes offering workshops, such as on [financial planning and voice training](#).

Summary

Women in Surgery Switzerland is the first association in Switzerland to specifically address the concerns of female surgeons. Our goal is to foster networking and make various career models visible. But we are more than just a platform for women – we [invite all surgeons](#) to come together and shape a new era of surgery, where everyone, regardless of gender or background, has the opportunity to grow and lead.

This year, we aim to expand into French-speaking Switzerland (including a website in French, Italian, and English), launch the mentoring program requested by our members, and host an exciting session at the [SCS Congress in Lausanne](#). We hope to meet you there and engage in a lively exchange.

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