

Canadian surgeon and opinion leader **Rosa Braga-Mele, MD, MEd, FRCSC**, is happy to show young women the possibilities available to them in the evolving (but still male-dominated) specialty of ophthalmology. She stresses that young physicians attracted to a leadership role working with industry should make sure they...

# DO IT FOR THE RIGHT REASONS





Getting involved in working with industry was rather organic for me. I developed an innovative approach to a surgical procedure, and the company whose equipment I was using recognized its novelty. That led to a request to work with the company, speaking about my use of its products at meetings. My role expanded as I began doing my own small studies and then speaking about the results on behalf of the companies whose technology I was using. In some cases, I spoke about new technologies that I believed would better fulfill the needs of my patient base.

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**THUS, I FELL INTO THE ROLE** of opinion leader. I enjoyed it because it allowed me to develop research opportunities and to have the podium visibility that I wanted. Even though in this role I am ostensibly in a partnership with industry, I never lose sight of the fact that it is important not to allow that partnership to influence me. You have to stick to your ethical guns and make sure that you are speaking for the right reasons.

This is what I say to companies: "If I think your product is good, I will speak on its behalf; however, I will never say anything bad about anybody else's product. If I believe another company's product is equally good and I am asked a question about it, I will be honest. If you do not want me on the podium because you do not want me to be honest or ethical in

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this manner, then I am not the person for you." This stance has always been accepted, and I have never had a problem with the companies I work with.

When I speak at an industry-sponsored dinner or symposium, I do not merely tout the sponsoring company's technology; I speak about the entire range of the technology in question, and then I discuss what benefits that particular company's technology might have over others. This is one of the ways I have maintained credibility as a speaker among my peers.

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**AS A FEMALE OPHTHALMIC SURGEON,** I believe that establishing a visibility and an opinion leadership presence is especially important. When I started speaking at the podium 18 years ago, the prevalence of women in ophthalmology

was very small. Because it was a male-dominated field, there were few women to look to as mentors at that time. As a result, most of my mentors were male. I. Howard Fine, MD, was my staunchest supporter and mentor. He took me under his wing and helped me with industry connections. Now, I believe that it is important for women to lead by example and be a presence at the podium, to help pave the way for younger women to be innovative and creative within our field.

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**THE MAJORITY OF MEDICAL STUDENTS NOW ARE WOMEN;** they should not feel like they are a minority. Today, almost 2 decades after I first stepped up to the podium, there is a much stronger female

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presence, but the upper echelons of the field are still male-dominated. Hopefully, we will see more equality in years to come.

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achieve better outcomes for our patients. ■

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Dr. Braga-Mele with her youngest son, Lucas.