Sex- and gender-based analysis and the CJRT: What can we do to combat bias in health research?

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Sex and gender have long been known to be strong predictors of health and many examples of health inequities can be at least partially explained by variations in these variables. Differences in these attributes can affect our risk of developing diseases (especially chronic conditions), the choice of and response to treatments, or how and when we seek health care. However, these important indicators are often overlooked in health research. Increasingly, however, consideration of these dimensions is a requirement of research from design to dissemination. For example, the Canadian Institutes of Health Research requires applicants to incorporate sex and gender into their research, when appropriate, while many journals include this as a requirement to publish. As such, I am excited to report that the Canadian Journal of Respiratory Therapy have updated our Author Guidelines to prompt authors to apply a Sex- and Gender-Based Analysis (SGBA) lens to their submissions, as appropriate.

While at times overlapping but ultimately describing different features, confusingly these terms are often used synonymously. Sex refers to biological attributes of physicality and physiology arising from chromosomal alignment in animals. Sex is predominantly categorized as female or male; however, intersex is an uncommon naturally occurring third category. In contrast, gender describes the socially constructed roles, behaviors, and societal norms associated with identifying as a man, a woman, or the increasingly growing gender-diverse identities in humans. Among the research and health community, gender is considered to be different from sex and different from sex-based characteristics. The terms sex and gender are often used equivalently, whereas difference in the use of the terms is increasingly noted. Regardless, gender an important social determinant of health.

Sex and gender bias in reporting of research results have been well known for many years. As such, I am excited to report that the Canadian Institutes of Health Research have updated our Author Guidelines to prompt authors to apply a Sex- and Gender-Based Analysis (SGBA) lens to their submissions, as appropriate.

In the meantime, and as always, wash your hands often while singing “Happy Birthday,” try not to touch your face, and wear your seafelt.

REFERENCES

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