

■ Pushing

THROUGH the glass CEILING

Women make up the majority of the aged care workforce but their numbers drop markedly at the higher levels of industry leadership.

Darragh O Keeffe asks prominent female CEOs why this is the case, and what should be done about it.

Following on from a summit attended by 200 executives held on International Woman's Day last March, a new report *Equality Means Business* has reignited the debate about the merit of gender quotas as a means of improving female representation in senior leadership and on company boards.

The recommendations include organisations aiming to have 40 per cent of each gender in management and leadership positions and to report annually on their progress.

Company boards are also being asked to achieve 40 per cent gender targets by 2015, using a three-to-three process involving one woman being added to the board each year as required.

While not new, these are ideas that aged care organisations may well benefit from considering.

A lack of research on women's leadership in aged care muddies the waters, however, anecdotally at least, it seems that while women do well in aged care management they aren't progressing into aged care leadership in perhaps the numbers they could be.

Four years ago Dr Lucy Morris, CEO of Baptistcare, completed her PhD on leadership, among other

things, in the not-for-profit sector.

She says a significant finding was the discrimination towards women in the community sector.

"Something like 88 per cent of the workforce is female, but men are located in the majority of professional positions. They tend to be concentrated in the senior and influential roles in IT, finance, planning, as well as the senior leadership positions of executive director, CEO and board directors. There is a disproportionate amount of men in the power positions," says Morris, who is also adjunct professor at the University of Notre Dame.

She says there are a number of reasons for this.

On a systemic level, many service not-for-profits originally came out of churches, and churches are patriarchal organisations, she says.

"Women tended not to hold any positions of power... Women worked with the undervalued in society – the aged, the sick, the homeless, the children. Women worked with the economically unimportant people in society because women themselves were largely seen as unimportant. It is one of the significant reasons why the charitable sector historically had poor wages."

Further, Morris says that the push from society and government for charities to become commercial entities "because of assumptions about business illiteracy", is further attracting men from the commercial sector.

Jumping the clinical fence

For Pam Bridges, president of Nurses in Management Aged Care (NIMAC), the clinical background of aged care workers is another likely reason many don't progress into leadership roles.

She says there have been few male graduate nurses coming through and the ones who do "tend to go straight into senior positions".

Bridges, who has been president of NIMAC for the past 13 years, says a small proportion of women do move up from the DON/facility manager level, "but predominantly the senior positions, within the larger providers, are filled by men". The majority of the aged care workforce comes from a clinical background, so that's not surprising, she says.

Robyn Batten, executive director of Blue Care, echoes this.

"Women are under-represented in aged care leadership at a board and CEO level, but then there is a

different skill set required for CEOs and administrative management roles,” she says. “When you look at clinical managers in aged care, women are well represented. However, research would need to be conducted to see whether those women want to be CEOs, as the job requirements are different.”

Bridges says that nurses are often encouraged to make the move from clinician to administrative manager but the organization doesn't support or resource them sufficiently in their new role.

“You have someone who is an excellent clinician. The company says to her, we need a manager; you're it. And she moves across. They haven't recognised that a brilliant RN

doesn't necessarily make a brilliant manager. They have no training of human resource issues and other management skills, for example. So people often get into management positions, and with no support or training they flounder, they feel like a failure, and we lose them,” says Bridges.

Bridges makes a “really, really important point”, says Sandra Hills, CEO of Benetas.

“If you step up and fail, it's pretty daunting after that. You know, tail between your legs; you lose a lot of faith,” she says.

Generational differences

However, Hills sees other factors at play, not least of which is a

generational issue.

She cites the recent ABC program *Paperwars*, a dramatization of the beginning of *Cleo* magazine, as an interesting depiction of the challenges women faced in the workplace during the 1970s – challenges many younger workers may not be aware of.

“So the people we're trying to attract into the industry now, and retain them and put them through aspiring leadership and management courses, won't necessarily have seen the struggle. The Australian Institute of Management and the Australian Institute of Company Directors (AICD) continue to run seminars and training, particularly for women, and I

INGRID WILLIAMS...

Aged care a watershed moment



“The one thing that is perhaps different in my story is that I don't have to juggle my job with family; I don't have children. I look at women who juggle work demands with children and family and perhaps other pursuits, such as board directorships. Women like that make the decision they want to have it all, but I think they realise they'll have it at different times, perhaps. I've always been very driven and passionate about my career, and I'm very fortunate in that I have a very supportive husband who has encouraged, supported and pushed me to do the things I've wanted to do.

I started my career as an acute nurse and was very passionate about my role. Looking back, it was almost a natural progression into management for me, several key opportunities arose which I hadn't sought. I was invited to become a unit manager for a year, which I embraced because at the time I was doing my masters in health administration. So, I saw that job offer as an opportunity to marry the research and the practice. I grabbed the opportunity and ran with it. I immediately fell in love with management. I relished taking responsibility for a team, developing a unit or a project, knowing I'd influenced an outcome. Moving to aged care was a watershed moment. I got to a point in my career where I felt I wasn't making the big difference I'd hoped for. I felt I was at the end of my life in acute. I left a position as general manager of a private hospital to take the job at TLC. I'm now in my fifth year as CEO.

At one point I started to get itchy feet; I needed a new mental challenge. A work colleague pointed me in the direction of the Williamson Community Leadership program which I went for. After its completion I started to get offers for board positions. I was approached to sit on the board of Crime Stoppers Victoria, and some other smaller boards, such as Craft Victoria. I was the first woman on the Crime Stoppers board.”

Ingrid Williams is CEO of TLC Aged Care.

Gender at the top

ORGANISATION	WOMEN	MEN
RDNS	3	7
ACSA	2	5
UnitingCare (national committee)	8	6
Regis (executive team)	1	5
Bupa (executive team)	3	6
ACQ	4	6
ACS (NSW/ACT)	5	10
ACAA NSW	3	7
ACAA	1	7
ACCV	5	7
Accreditation Agency	4	4
Domain Principal (executive team)	1	5
Anglicare Australia (council members)	4	6
Montefiore Aged Care	2	11
Presbyterian Aged Care	5	8
RSL Care	2	8
Southern Cross Care (Qld)	0	9
Southern Cross Care (WA)	0	7
Resthaven	3	5
Brightwater Care Group	4	4
Bethanie	2	6
Wesley Mission	3	11
Lend Lease	1	6

NOTES: Numbers refer to the boards of each organisation unless otherwise indicated. Compiled from organisational websites.

know a lot of women, particularly young women, who don't see a point in that anymore. Because they actually don't see what the problem is. They don't see what the entrance barriers are. And there shouldn't be many now, but for some people there still are,” says Hills.

While Valerie Lyons, CEO of Villa Maria, says the number of women in senior positions in sectors like finance and community services has improved in the last few decades, she believes the challenge is to ensure that momentum isn't lost.

“We need to be constantly looking at it. I guess that's one of the reasons why, if we look to the issue of ratios and the like, whether or not there's an opportunity to increase female participation as a consequence of ratios, they can prompt greater awareness of what participation is or isn't happening,” says Lyons.

Asked if she therefore supports the notion of quotas for improving gender balance on boards, Lyons says there are arguments for and against.

“I see some disadvantages in them, in that I always believe the best person should be the person who get the job; the person with the appropriate skill and experience. Having said that, it is important for us to keep data and record and measure what is happening,” she says.

The quota question

The quota issue is of key importance in the discussion around female aged care leadership, as proponents point out that organisational culture starts at the top – at the board level.

Morris is “significantly in favour of affirmative processes and systems” until the leadership and management make-up changes. She says that unless a point of irritation for both men and women is reached, nothing will be done about it.

Hills says the AICD, of which she is a member, has a policy in favour of quotas because they feel companies haven't moved quickly enough.

“I don't think, by itself, a quota is going to achieve what they [AICD] want it to achieve, as fast as they'd like. There's going to have to be a lot more cultural change from existing boards, and directors and shareholders.”

For Ingrid Williams, the CEO of TLC Aged Care, quotas are not a solution to boosting female participation.

“I would be very disappointed if there was positive discrimination towards women on boards,” she says. “You want the right skill set on a board and to that end, the gender isn't the primary issue. I think that yes, if people are developing their boards they will look at diversity, and skill,

JENNENE BUCKLEY... CEO at 32



"Feros Care was struggling quite a bit when I came. There were financial problems, and a big turnover of people at the senior management level. Coming to a smaller organization, and one undergoing quite a bit of change, I had to be very hands-on, very quickly. I remember running around the different services, getting my hands on rosters, working with all levels of staff to get the organisation back on track. I mean, now we have a big organisational team; we have about 30 managers now. And I feel confident as chief executive understanding all those

areas, working with those managers, because I've worked at the grassroots and seen and understood what's happening in each area.

At the end of the day, leadership is hard work. You must make the decision to invest in your career, to give it your all. It's like running a business; it requires the same energy and dedication. There are no half measures. You need to invest in your career outside of the 9 to 5. If there's an area you're not very strong on, then study it, find out about it. Of course, that's why leadership isn't for everyone. Some people want more of a work-life balance.

You need to have a strong vision and surround yourself with people who can work with you to make the dream a reality. I have seven managers in our senior team and they're excellent.

Aged care is such a wonderful industry, with big changes and challenges ahead. But I think this also means there is a lot of possibility and opportunity for people to step up, to innovate. So much can be achieved, if you put the energy and dedication into it. It's incredibly rewarding to work in. We need young leaders with new ideas, and fresh thinking. That is what is going to create the aged care industry of the future."

Jennene Buckley is CEO of Feros Care.

and ultimately achieve a balance."

Williams says that ultimately it would not be very helpful putting women into positions "for the sake of it, they have to want the job".

Acting in the affirmative

The quota issue aside, many are confident, and passionate, that there are key strategies organisations should be putting in place to encourage and assist women with leadership aspirations.

Morris says mentoring, coaching and effective programs of professional development from within the industry are essential.

"We need to give women the capacity to go back and do further study... We need to recognise their life and work experience and change the narratives we tell in the boardroom and in leadership meetings. We need to change the way we think of career development. Not a single tracked train-line, but much more rounded and holistic in approach, embracing both younger and older aged women," she says.

Further, she says the industry should allow and encourage men to step into spaces traditionally seen as female – such as becoming the stay-at-home parent.

"We need a significant mind shift on how we manage workloads and work shifts. We need to re-think pay structures, and leave structures. We need to change the boys' club culture in the 'ordering' and defining of the workplace and lose the very old-fashioned notions of employment and awards which hark back to the sixties and seventies in the UK," says Morris.

Batten says that it can be more daunting for women who are having children to balance everything, "which is why organisations need to

be flexible to that".

"We need to be serious about offering flexible working arrangements, such as job sharing and part time positions, so we don't lose women but allow them to reach their full potential on their chosen career paths," she says.

"We need to support families," agrees Williams. "Of course we need people to be able to strike a work-life balance. I don't have a problem with people reducing their hours, as long as the work gets done. It's really important to have flexible workplaces, particularly so people don't fall into a rut."

Morris says she recently suggested a leadership group for women working in the not-for-profit sector and has been "amazed at the interest it has sparked at our inaugural gathering".

Hills also wonders if the issue should be considered through a broader lens, rather than purely as a challenge confronting individual organisations.

"Maybe we need to do something more collectively around aspiring leadership programs, and mentor programs," she says. "Because a lot of the big agencies, like ours; we all have our own... I certainly would be willing to offer our assistance to take a more regional or state-wide approach. Rather than Benetas doing what it can to get our own staff, you know, I think it's broader than that."

Similarly, Bridges cites the importance of professional bodies like NIMAC that offer networking opportunities to women.

Finally, some advice

"I say to all women, don't ever see yourself as 'just' whatever," says Morris. "Stand up for yourself. Don't believe what people are telling you if they're putting you down. Put yourself in the space where other women will support you. Continue your professional development wherever you can. Try to get a good

DR LUCY MORRIS... whatever doesn't kill you...



"When I finished university, in the early to mid 1980s, I emerged into a world where there was very limited childcare. Women were still not expected to compete and operate in the workforce. I'd met my husband at university and we got married and had children early on, and we negotiated between us that I would have a full time career.

I experienced more than a few knockbacks. I mean, we didn't have family nearby, and at one stage my wages were so poor and childcare was so expensive we almost went broke. I had to give up work for five months

while I looked for other work as my husband earned more than me at the time. I remember going for one job in a PR consultancy, to be the first female consultant in the company, and being interviewed by the chairman. I was told I shouldn't be there; I had young children, what was I doing looking for work?

When I talk to my staff now, I listen to the younger women and I hear similar stories. Stories of being passed over, being knocked back, not being put forward for work growth opportunities, under-estimated and not being listened to is still a reality for them. I mean just look at the wage parity issue. I realized that further education was important, and went on to pursue my doctorate. And, critically, some really good, knowledgeable, smart, generous women and men have helped me along the way."

Dr Lucy Morris is CEO of Baptistcare.

VALERIE LYONS...

eyeing the top job early on



"I've not experienced the glass ceiling that people often talk about. It's about embracing, anticipating, preparing for opportunities that might come. An approach I've taken, and it's what I put down to the success I've had, is I've had a rolling five year professional plan since my early 20s. That's assisted my evolution in leadership. I've looked to not just how I can develop myself professionally and academically, but how I can develop and advance the organization to which I've been involved in. Also, I've looked at my potential commitment to the industry. So I've had those

three tiers in terms of what I focus on in my career. I've sought to align my family and career commitments as well.

It's about holding true to your own professional and personal values and ethics; that's the way forward in decision making. It's about having mutual respect and regard for those you work and engage with, whether that's the board, whether that's staff that report to you.

I always aspired to leadership roles and I would say in my late 20s I decided I wanted to be in the kind of role I'm in today, so fairly long term aspirations in that regard. Mainly because, in these kinds of roles, you can very much influence much more effectively the direction of an organization in terms of strategic planning and what the future might hold. And so your capacity to influence community and outcomes is much more significant."

Valerie Lyons is CEO of Villa Maria.

education – it doesn't matter if you have to wait a little until the kids are older. Put your hand up. Find your voice, and speak up."

For Lyons, women need to first understand themselves, and what their drivers are. Leadership is not for everyone, nor is the CEO role.

"And they need to look at how they measure success in life," she says. "It is one thing to be CEO of a not-for-profit organization and quite another to be CEO of one of the big public companies or the like. So it depends on what people are looking for, whether it's financial drivers or it's about contributing greater outcomes to society; people need to understand that first.

"Having understood that, if they still aspire to a CEO's leadership

role I would then apply my five Ps: planning, passion, professionalism, persistence, and presence. The heart of it all is about planning; it's about bringing your vision to creation, whether it's your own professional evolution or a team or organizational development. It's imperative for success that you have passion for the sector and organisation in which you commit your working life to. It's about professionalism, building your competence, your expertise and your skill."

It's about being persistent, being determined, being positive and not giving up, she says.

"And finally it is about presence, get involved; you cannot achieve as much on the side lines," she says. ■

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