



## Letter

## Conquering fear and accepting new challenges

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I have no recollection of when I first desired to become a scientist. I cannot forget, however, how I felt when I read a biography of Marie Skłodowska Curie. I was mesmerized by the passion, strength, empathy and “stubborn” intelligence that led her to important achievements despite prejudices, disparities and discriminations in times when the field of science was much precluded to women.

During the years of medical school, although my primary preoccupation was to learn how to diagnose diseases and choose the most appropriate care, the desire of scientific inquiry carried me throughout my studies. I was entranced with the beauty and the mystery of the human brain and I decided to pursue a specialization in Neurology. Unfortunately, several neurological disorders are of unknown aetiology and treatments are not available for most of them. Therefore, after completing my neurology residency training, I made myself a promise: I would step back from clinical practice and devote my time to research, learning as much as possible about neuroscience. This was a huge personal challenge. I had to leave my hometown to fully explore what at the time was an emerging subject of research: neuroimaging of multiple sclerosis. The beginning was exceptionally hard. I recall a fear of failure that I'd never experienced before. I could not clearly understand whether going into research was the right choice for me. In retrospect, earning a PhD in Neuroscience has been a life changing experience. Doing research enriches

my daily work as a clinician, and the years of tenure at New York University and Mount Sinai have taught me not to be afraid of change and failure. A mentor told me that every failure is an opportunity, and I have learned from my own experience that it requires both initiative and action to be able to overcome setbacks and find new directions that may ultimately prove more fruitful than initial choices. I have been lucky, and I feel unlimited gratitude—to my family, mentors and friends. I miss my father who died before my medical school graduation. I can never thank him enough for teaching me the freedom to pursue my path in my own distinctive way.

Madame Curie has been a unique role model, and progress for women in academic science has been remarkable over the past decades. Meanwhile, many more women have access to professional careers that were previously the exclusive privilege of men. However, it is disheartening to observe that women remain to have gained little access to high-rank leadership positions, to equitable resources, rewards and compensation despite their contributions and their high level of professional competence [1,2].

It is time for change, and I look forward to a near future where treatment of individuals will be truly based on merit rather than on gender stereotypes.

## Declaration of competing interest

None.

## References

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