Members of the WGH Community, Supporters, and Allies,

Words cannot capture the immensity of the challenges we faced as a world in 2020. But our community, the Women in Global Health movement, has been on the pandemic frontlines delivering health services, in solidarity, innovating, and advocating for better health for all, especially for women. As a physician, I have seen the suffering of hospital wards this year.

2020 was a milestone year for our movement, as we celebrated 5 years since four early-career women met on Twitter and decided to form Women in Global Health, determined to catalyze change. Having run our global movement on volunteer ‘woman power’ for four years, in 2020 we raised funds to support a small new 5-year strategy committed to challenging power and privilege and leveraging gender equity in global health.

By the close of 2020 our movement was 24 chapters strong, with many more in the pipeline for 2021 and 35,000 supporters from over 90 countries. We are proud of our growing community of leaders from all walks of life and corners of the world. Our projects, campaigns, and ideas were beyond influential in 2020 and we couldn’t have done it without your support - but we’re not done yet.

With our new global strategy, WGH will ignite change through four pathways:
1. growing our global movement with its network of national chapters,
2. advocating for change through events and campaigns,
3. garnering commitments to gender equity in health from governments and key organizations, and
4. holding leaders to account through policy evidence and research.

Our priorities for 2021:
As the WHO’s Executive Board opens on 18th January, follow our top 10 watch list for 2021.

2021 is a new year but the challenges we faced in 2020 still overshadow our lives. The COVID-19 pandemic is far from over and the health, social, and economic impacts will last long into the future, especially for women and girls. Despite the severity of COVID-19, we cannot take our focus off the other threats faced by our world - climate change, political instability, increasing poverty, and deep, persistent inequalities - all being intensified by the pandemic and hitting women the hardest.
As we start 2021, vaccines give us hope for an end to the death and destruction of the pandemic. In a deeply unequal world, however, we will not end the pandemic everywhere without global, multilateral cooperation working in solidarity across borders to build resilience for future health emergencies. The pandemic has been a stark and tragic reminder of the importance of our health and the value of the health and social care workers - majority women - who put their own health and lives at risk to care for us. We are all interconnected in the fight for gender equity in health, so let’s put our words into action and walk the talk this year on global health equity.

Since 2021 is the International Year of Health and Care Workers, WGH will continue advocating for gender equity in the health and social workforce through the Gender Equity Hub, which we co-chair with WHO, and through thought leadership, targeted events, and campaigns.

We will not only track gender and global health priorities throughout the year, but we will also call it out every time policies and analysis are gender blind. We will not let a single manel (all-male panel) or male-dominated decision-making group go unchallenged, because gender-balanced groups make better health decisions. We will work on the pervasive inequalities that no one else will call out in global health - the unpaid and underpaid work done by women in health and care work. We will demand that governments and others #PayWomen for their work. We can no longer tolerate a world where global health is subsidized by the unpaid labor of the world’s poorest women.

We will call out the ‘open secret’ of sexual harassment, bullying, and violence of women health workers, abuse women spend their working lives trying to avoid and that their male colleagues see and rarely challenge. We believe women, and we see power and privilege operating unfairly in our sector – including within the UN system - and we will not stay silent.

This year, we will channel our energies into expanding our work and deepening our impact. The voices of talented women leaders in global health have not always been heard during COVID-19 - we will focus on fixing systems and not women - we will demand more opportunities for women, especially women from underrepresented groups. And we will create more opportunities for women to lead change, through our national chapters and working groups.

We go into this year with renewed energy and determination to ensure women lead the way. Most importantly, in 2021, we plan to learn and grow with all of you. You are the movement. When we work together we can transform global health and achieve a gender-equal world.

Happy new year from Women in Global Health!

Sincerely,

Dr. Roopa Dhatt
Women in Global Health Co-Founder & Executive Director