

The National Herald

AGAPW and ALLILONnet Symposium on Inspiring Women in STEM

By Eleni Sakellis March 1, 2018



The AGAPW and ALLILONnet Symposium on Inspiring Women in STEM panelists- Vassiliki Karantzou, MD; Anastasia Romanou, PhD; Pannie Trifillis, PhD – Moderator; Stella Kafka, PhD; Konstantinos Alexakos, PhD; Eliana Antoniou, PhD; and Stella Lymberis, MD. Photo by Costas Bej

NEW YORK – AGAPW (Association of Greek American Professional Women) and ALLILONnet held a symposium on Inspiring Women in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) on February 28 at the Wells Fargo Corporate Building Conference Center, in Midtown Manhattan. The speakers on the panel were Vassiliki Karantzou, MD; Anastasia Romanou, PhD; Eliana Antoniou, PhD; Konstantinos Alexakos, PhD; Stella Kafka, PhD; Stella Lymberis, MD; and Pannie Trifillis, PhD – Moderator.

AGAPW President Olga Alexakos gave the welcoming remarks and expressed gratitude to Mr. Nikko Mobasher and Wells Fargo Private Mortgage Banking for hosting the event at their facilities. Alexakos then introduced Pannie Trifillis, the moderator for the discussion. Dr. Trifillis is the Vice President, Global Medical Affairs and Head of Global Scientific Affairs for PTC Therapeutics, Inc. where she has worked for 19 years and began as their first scientist, initiating the program that led to the discovery and development of Translarna™, the first approved, disease-modifying treatment for nonsense mutation Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy (DMD), a fatal, orphan, rare genetic disease.

The objectives of the event were to provide insights into the status of women in the STEM fields in the United States; encourage and support women involved in all aspects of STEM; inspire young women to pursue studies and a career in the STEM fields; provide a forum for networking; and applaud men's support of their mothers, wives, daughters, sisters, and students.

The distinguished panelists shared their professional journeys and their words of wisdom from their first-hand knowledge of the subject. Each began by giving a brief background on what they studied and about their current positions in the STEM field. Trifillis showed a few slides, giving a brief overview of STEM and giving statistics about women in STEM from a 2017 study by the U.S. Department of Commerce which

highlighted how crucial STEM jobs are and also how competitive. Though men earn more than women, as in most fields, women with STEM jobs and degrees earn 34 percent more than women without either a STEM job or degree. Women who work in a STEM job but do not have a STEM degree also earn 23 percent more than those not in a STEM job and without a STEM degree.



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Most of the panelists were born and raised in either Greece or Cyprus and all emphasized the high quality of education they received there which prepared them for furthering their studies in the STEM field, though many had to choose to study abroad in the United States, for example, where there were more opportunities.

Dr. Karantza noted that her undergraduate degree was in chemistry from the University of Athens but she decided later to go into medicine and that basic science was very relevant to the practice of medicine and medicine made her appreciate basic science when she went back to the lab. Dr. Karantza is the Product Development Team (PDT) Lead Breast Cancer – Clinical Research Oncology at Merck, Sharp & Dohme (MSD).

Dr. Anastasia (Natassa) Romanou is a research professor at Columbia University and NASA-Goddard Institute in New York. She works in climate science and in particular the influence and interdependence of the oceans and the Earth System. She teaches numerical modeling for climate applications at Columbia University and is a member of the Earth Science Advisory Committee at NASA.

Prof. Romanou noted that her undergraduate degree was in physics, no one in her family was in science, and in fact, she was the first in her family to go to university. At a young age, she was inspired to go into physics by books introducing young readers to physics that explained the universe.

Dr. Kafka, whose mother is from Cyprus and father from Greece, was born and raised in Athens, and used to break things to figure out how they worked. Her degree is in physics and astronomy and after years of traveling around the world, including time spent at the observatory in Chile, she works with American Association of Variable Star Observers, a non-profit organization that connects professional and amateur astronomers.



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Dr. Konstantinos Alexakos is the Professor, Coordinator of Adolescence Science Education, at the School of Education, Brooklyn College, CUNY, and The Learning Sciences Specialization in the Ph.D. Program in Urban Education, The Graduate Center, City University of New York (Joint appointment with Brooklyn College). He noted that for him, research has become teaching and teaching research as he deals with emotions in the classroom and the challenging issues including race, class, and gender.

Eliana Antoniou, originally from Cyprus, is a professor and 16-year veteran of the Mathematics Department at William Paterson University, Wayne, New Jersey, where she also served as assistant to the department chair. Her areas of specialization are applied mathematics and modeling of biological systems. She said that encouragement by her professors and mentors helped her continue her studies in the U.S. and she loves teaching and is very involved with the Hellenic organizations on campus.

Dr. Stella Lymberis wanted to be an astronaut when she was growing up and her father, a physicist, encouraged her to explore her interest in science. From being the only girl in her AP Physics class, she hopes to encourage young women to pursue STEM careers, and noted how math and analysis is an asset in a variety of fields.

Among the advice for women in STEM was to maintain work-life balance and to realize that it is okay to take time off to recharge, maintaining a positive attitude and keeping away from negative people and thoughts, and also not judging yourself harshly or comparing yourself to others who are probably also struggling to balance work and life. The importance of networking was also highlighted, as Trifillis said, “networking is your net worth,” and you never know how a connection may help in your career. Joining professional organizations, like AGAPW, and participating in mentoring can also make a great impact on a career path in STEM and in other fields as well.

A Q&A session followed the panel discussion. The event concluded with AGAPW President Olga Alexakos thanking all those in attendance and encouraging everyone to attend the next event, the Greek American Woman of the Year Award Gala honoring Ioanna Giannopoulou- Director of Operations at CosmosFM Hellenic Public Radio. More information is available online at: agapw.org.



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