



Women in Cannabis

By Leslie Apgar, MD

Medical Director, Greenhouse Wellness
Ellicott City, Maryland

I am, if nothing else, a champion of women and have been so my entire career, including in my current role in the medical cannabis field as well as in my 18 years as a board-certified obstetrician and gynecologist (OB/GYN). Co-founding the female-owned medical cannabis dispensary, Greenhouse Wellness, and developing female-focused medical cannabis products are examples of how I am leveling the playing field and supporting women as much as possible.

There is a real inadequacy and imbalance in the cannabis industry. First, there are not enough female leaders in the cannabis space.

As described in our book *High Heals*,¹ before we decided to open our own medical cannabis dispensary, I was approached to be the medical director for another applicants' dispensary license bid. I invited my friend and venture capitalist, Gina Dubbé, to the meeting where we were "mansplained" to. I was embarrassed for taking the meeting and wasting Gina's time.

However, when Gina looked at the request for proposal application required for the dispensary license bid she said, "Let's just do this ourselves." We didn't have enough time to form an LLC before submitting the bid, so Gina applied for the bid using her name. We won that bid, and when Gina's name appeared in the local newspaper announcing the win, the bank where she had her personal savings account and mortgage for 35 years called her up and invited her to take her accounts elsewhere.

Gina asked, "Wait, are you asking your male clients who won the bid also to leave your bank? Are you doing this because I'm a female?" The bank backed down. These are the types of gender-based biases that most women are familiar with, but what's important here is that Gina and I recognized these slights, brought them to light, and asserted a positive resolution instead of swallowing hard and walking away.

Second, there are not enough cannabis products geared toward women and that is something that Gina and I are actively



trying to change with our line of female-focused cannabis products that are high in cannabidiol (CBD) and have various ratios of delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol (THC). Many products have names and packaging that are geared to the male market and we are mindfully addressing these disparities with our female-based product line, Blissiva.

Assume Up

Often when I am greeted and people find out that I am in medicine, they assume I am a nurse or a technician. It is rare that they think I am a physician or surgeon and this assumption is

made as often by women as by men.

Thus, one of the things that I teach my kids, students, staff, and whomever I come in contact with professionally is to "assume up." When you meet a woman in the airline industry, assume she's the pilot and watch what happens to her face when you do that.

The theme "assume up" is interwoven into every single thing that I do as a business owner and speaker. In my OB/GYN career, I loved taking care of teenagers and being their cheerleader. I would tell them that they could have the world, while being realistic about what that world looks like.

And now, here in the cannabis space, I am still trying to show women that they actually are wearing a superwoman cape, they just don't see it or they can't recognize it. I want to support women who come to me as patients as well as women on my staff. Women are, most of the time, the entry into health care for their families. Many women approach me in the cannabis realm not only for their own care, but also for their husbands/partners or their children.

The cannabis space is ripe with opportunities for those who want to pursue them. I would encourage women specifically to step up and be heard. Their voices are important and reflect more than half of our population. It is high time we started listening.

Reference

1. Apgar L, Dubbé G. *High heals: How two women found their footing in the medical cannabis industry*. High Heals, LLC; 2019.

Dr. Apgar is co-owner of Greenhouse Wellness and Blissiva, and is co-author of High Heals.