

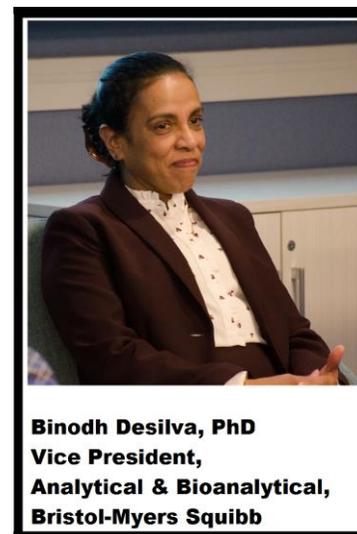
## **Introducing Binodh S. Desilva PhD,**

### **Vice President, Analytical and Bioanalytical Operations, Bristol-Myers Squibb.**

*As discussed with Kamana Misra PhD, Founding Editor AWISNJ Articles*

- In your professional life, being a female has been an advantage or a disadvantage?

I have been provided with opportunities that has been scientifically challenging, rewarding and fulfilling as I moved through the ranks in the industry. I am a first-generation immigrant from Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka is a progressive Asian country with respect to influential women, for example we had the first female Prime minister in the world. When I came to the United States, I was somewhat taken aback when I was informed of the gender differences that existed in the professional world. I was the only female in my Chemistry honors class in Sri Lanka with 12 other male colleagues where I had the same privileges as them. In contrast, there were many female graduate students in the University of Kansas where I got my Ph.D. There was a lot of comradery and cooperation in these experiences. While my experiences have been positive, on balance I am fully cognizant of the fact that there have been many female scientists who sacrificed their professional careers to pave this way for us.



- There is fortunately a lot of focus currently on a more inclusive STEM & Entrepreneurship landscape. Despite all the work being done, the world economic forum 2016 global gender gap report predicts it will take approximately 150 years to achieve gender equity in America. Do you think we can accelerate this process?

I strongly believe that we have and can accelerate this process. First, there is more awareness to these facts than before. The data are available and there are ongoing discussions. Second, Associations such as AWIS, HBA, AAPS, ACS and other scientific and professional organizations are in the forefront providing visibility, training and guiding women to engage in STEM activities. Finally, I am a major proponent of introducing the STEM curriculum (age appropriate) from a very young age and encouraging students to participate and make it fun. Our teachers need to be equipped with tools to work on STEM initiatives thereby, making it an everyday learning process. While the numbers are still low, there are female Presidents of Universities, CEOs of major corporations, and prominent world leaders who are role models. I believe there is a lot more to be done but we are on the right path.

- What has been the role of mentoring in your professional life? Have females helped you more than males?

I would not be where I am professionally without the support of my family, teachers and mentors. My coaching and mentoring started at home. My parents were both science teachers and had a relentless work ethic. My mother was constantly telling my sister and me, that we could be anyone we wanted to be if we worked hard. The value of education, uncompromising ethics and the simple lifestyle that my parents instilled on us has been the North Star for me.

There have been both male and female mentors in my professional life. They have provided feedback both on a given situation, or general career advice. In either situation they have provided me with tools to evaluate the situations in multiple different ways and to apply the learnings from both the personal and professional experiences.

- Any message to the next generation of STEM professionals and the audience

Think big, think bold and be creative in your goals and aspirations. Be persistent in pursuing your STEM goals. Educate yourselves beyond your discipline, understand the environment you are in and the opportunities that exist. Don't be afraid to take opportunistic risks.