
Optimum
Strategic Communications
International Day of
Women & Girls in Science 2026
If you could collaborate with any scientist
(past or present), who would it be and why?
Click to discover what inspires the #WomeninHealthcare

**Eva Haas**
Optimum

It would be an honoured learning experience at the hands of Prof. Özlem Türeci, M.D. for me. She is the co-founder and CMO (with her CEO husband) of BioNTech and prior to that Ganymed. I am inspired by her ground-breaking work in oncology: cancer antigen discovery, development of mRNA-based individualised vaccine candidates and other types of immunotherapies, amongst many things.

**Kate Bingham**
SV Health Investors

I would collaborate with Rosalind Franklin, whose ground-breaking X-ray work on DNA and viruses pioneered structural biology. Her inductive reasoning and resilience against systemic discrimination fuel led my passion for science. For her foundational research, she should have won two Nobel Prizes (DNA and virus structure). Her insights remain critical for vaccine discovery.

**Bonnie van Wilgenburg**
Monograph Capital

I would collaborate again with Sally Cowley, my PhD co-supervisor. After a family-related career break, her return to the lab showed what's possible when women are supported (back) into science. A leader in translational stem cell research, her calm leadership and integrity profoundly shaped my scientific and healthcare VC journey.

**Eliane Schutte**
Xeltis

I am inspired by Nobel laureate Prof. Jean-Marie Lehn's groundbreaking vision for supramolecular chemistry, I was drawn to Xeltis to advance polymer-based implants that emulate nature's adaptive systems. His work on molecular recognition and self-organising architectures motivates my commitment to creating next-generation, PFAS-free biomaterials that overcome the limitations of permanent, conventional polymers. Bringing safer and better implants to patients is what drives me every day.

**Olivia Cavlan**
LifeArc Ventures

If I wanted to sound scholarly, I'd cite Marie Curie, but I only read Dava Sobel's The Elements of Marie Curie last year. Honestly, it was re-watching Back to the Future with my kids over Christmas - Dr. Emmett Brown and his flux capacitor who inspired my passion for sciences, with his excitement of incredible potential, crushing lows of failures, and stubborn determination of survival against the odds!

**Colleen Acosta**
Freya Biosciences

I would choose Ada Lovelace, who envisioned computation to model complex systems. I think she would be excited by today's AI and computational power to interpret vast biological datasets, model disease mechanisms, and generate insight to accelerate therapeutic discovery. For me, she is a reminder that innovation often starts with imagining what technology could become, long before it's technically possible.

**Annalisa Jenkins**
Non-Executive Director

I would collaborate with Dame Molly Stevens. Her work is unique for its focus on the bio-interface, where she engineers materials that mimic human tissue to heal the body. I am inspired by her "democratisation of healthcare" mission - designing ultrasensitive nanotechnology, like smartphone-connected tests, that provides life-saving diagnostics to low-resource communities, proving that cutting-edge science should be a global right.

**Mary Clark**
Optimum

My choice is Nobel Prize winner Katalin Karikó and her groundbreaking work on modified mRNA. Her work paved the way for BioNTech/Pfizer and Moderna COVID-19 vaccines which saved millions of lives through the pandemic. She has demonstrated enormous reliance and perseverance throughout her career which is truly inspiring.

**Fiona MacLaughlin**
Johnson & Johnson Innovation

I'd choose Mary Kerr, she is one of those unique individuals who blends rigorous scientific thinking, patient-first instinct and entrepreneurial courage. Mary played a pivotal role in developing, and having approved, a novel alternative treatment to hormone replacement therapy for women for moderate to severe hot flashes and night sweats associated with menopause. She focused on pushing science through partnership to solve a problem for a patient population that is often overlooked – us women!

**Dr. Anne Lane**
UCL Business

I am so proud to work with many female founders of UCL spinout businesses; women leading pioneering research whilst heading up high-growth businesses bringing life-saving therapeutics to market. Having been a researcher myself before UCL Business, I know the tenacity, vision and sheer confidence required to get innovations to market – and how those successes inspire the next generation.

**Maina Bhaman**
Sofinnova Partners

I would choose Elizabeth Blackburn. Her Nobel Prize–winning discovery of telomerase uncovered a core mechanism of cancer cell immortality. Collaborating with her at that moment would mean translating fundamental biology into oncology diagnostics and therapies, shaping how we understand tumour progression, aging, and precision cancer treatment.

**Marta Llorens**
Oxolife

If I could collaborate with any scientist, I would choose the BCNatal team at Sant Joan de Déu Hospital. Their pioneering artificial-placenta research combines scientific excellence and transformative clinical impact, which deeply inspires me. Having such a world-leading research centre in my home city of Barcelona is a true source of pride and motivation.

**Elisabeth de Brouwer**
ViceBio

Charles Darwin inspires me with his audacity and adventurous spirit, daring to explore the unknown at a time when such voyages were considered risky and pointless. What drives me most is his openness to new ideas and his humility in seeking perspectives from others. His example reminds me that courage, curiosity, and collaboration can lead to discoveries and impact beyond oneself.

**Zoë Johnson**
Venture Builder

I would choose Polly Matzinger for her single-minded devotion to questions that wouldn't let her go. Her pursuit of the danger model against resistance taught me something important: boldness and relentless focus, bordering on obsession, is what propels science forward.

**Nicole Raleigh**
Pharmaphorum

I'd like to say Chien-Shiung Wu or Lisa Meitner, but my grasp of physics not extensive enough for collaboration, I'll instead say inventor, physiotherapist, and forensic scientist Bessie Blount Griffin, for her work - against adversity - for access for the disabled, creating devices to ease the daily life of veteran amputees.

**Elisa Petris**
Syncona

If I could collaborate with any group of scientists, it would be the pioneers of CAR-T cell therapy. Their work, built on decades of insights in immunology and bioengineering, turned T cells into living drugs and delivered functional cures and durable remissions in previously terminal cancers. That vision of transformative personalised medicines inspires me in my work building and funding tomorrow's biotech companies.

**Cristina Csimma**
Asgard Therapeutics

My secondary education math teacher (a woman) and my high school physics teacher (a man). Amazing, inspiring teachers, they didn't just teach subjects, they taught what a scientist could be: curious, sharp, human and cool; role models that expand what seems possible. Along with my parents, they also inspired excellence through a balance of rigor and encouragement, shaping both interest and self-image.

**Catherine Priestley**
Fresenius Kabi

I would love to be able to collaborate with Dr Tessa Webb, Fellow in Genetics at Birmingham. She was my undergraduate supervisor and a formative influence on my career in life sciences and interest in gene therapy. Trained in an era before DNA's structure was known, I often reflect on how she would view today's advances in genetic engineering and the possibilities they unlock.

**Ester Sklarsky**
Sound Bioventures

I'd choose Shinya Yamanaka because his work changed how I think about biological limits. By proving that cell identity can be reset, he showed that even deeply established systems can be re-engineered. That mindset is central to both me and Sound Bioventures, trusting rigorous data over dogma and building medicines by reimagining what biology is capable of when long-held limits are questioned.

**Ana Apezteguia**
Neuraxpharm

If I could collaborate with any scientist, it would be May-Britt Moser. Her groundbreaking work uncovering how the brain maps and navigates space has transformed modern neuroscience. I admire her curiosity, scientific precision, and remarkable leadership in advancing our understanding of the human mind. She is an inspiring example of innovation and perseverance in science.

**Nadiya Ishnazarova**
Johnson & Johnson Innovation

If I could collaborate with any scientist, I'd choose Ilya Mechnikov, whose discovery of phagocytosis founded modern immunology. He was passionately devoted to science, unafraid to be controversial when he truly believed in an idea yet always remained open-minded and curious. Working with him would be scientifically and personally inspiring!

**Nathalie Lenne**
Kainova Therapeutics

I think about the women I could never have collaborated with, the ones whose ideas were overlooked, the women kept from learning or working, and above all those denied education for being girls. Their absence deprives science of insights that help us understand our world and care for it better and shows how essential it is to let everyone contribute.

**Alba Fernandez Bessa**
Inveready

I would collaborate with Rita Levi-Montalcini because of her determination to advance scientific understanding and her ability to trust her work despite strong barriers. Her discovery of nerve growth factor shaped modern neuroscience and enabled advances in the study of neurodegenerative diseases. Her attitude is a reminder that even today, when challenges remain, believing in solid science and giving it the support it needs can lead to meaningful impact.

**Nanna Luneborg**
Forbion

Charles Darwin - his curiosity, perseverance, and ability to systematically observe and record the world around him, led to a fundamental shift in our understanding of biology and the origins of life. All powered by the simple question of why.

**Kristin-Anne Rutter**
Cambridge University Health Partners

Sadaf Farooqi is at the forefront of increased understanding of metabolism and eating behaviour. She pursued the scientific understanding when it was not in vogue and talking to her years ago about her discoveries rekindled my own passion for what science can achieve. Her enthusiasm and desire to make a difference to patients, support younger scientists is insatiable and she is a fabulous communicator.

**Elizabeth Holt**
iOnctura

I would collaborate with Gertrude Elion, whose pioneering use of rational drug design yielded treatments for leukemia, organ transplantation, herpes, and HIV. She was motivated to pursue a career in medicine by her grandfather's death from cancer and focused on patient impact throughout her career. Though she never earned a PhD, she received the 1988 Nobel Prize in Medicine.

**Paige Cramer Lacatena**
Merck

I would relish the opportunity to learn from Alois Alzheimer, the clinical psychiatrist and neuroanatomist who identified both of the pathological hallmarks of Alzheimer's disease, ultimately known as amyloid beta plaques and tau neurofibrillary tangles. I would share with him that while progress is being made, we've not cured Alzheimer's disease yet, but I'm hopeful for a future therapeutic.

**Carrie Haslam**
Drug Target Review

It would be Professor Mildred Dresselhaus, often called the "Queen of Carbon." During my PhD on graphene biosensors, seeing a woman lead and excel in carbon nanomaterials showed me what was possible within physics and nanotechnology.

**Manuela Simonetti**
FundaMental Pharma

Rita Levi-Montalcini. As a Jewish woman who refused to let fear or prejudice silence her love for science during the darkness of World War II, she kept her desire for knowledge alive through wisdom, intuition, and resilience. Working with her would mean rediscovering the true spirit of science: insatiable curiosity, perseverance, and relentlessly pursuing knowledge with courage and passion.

**Laura Asbjornsen**
Forbion

If I could collaborate with any scientist, it would be Trinidadian marine biologist Dr. Diva Amon. Her work shows how science impacts planetary and human health - something I engage with every day. From discovering new species to sharing deep-ocean science on Disney+'s Welcome to Earth with Will Smith, her impact is global. While I'm not a scientist, I'm proud to help narrate the scientific perspective at Forbion, supporting science that creates opportunity everywhere.

**Tara Raveendran**
Polar Capital

Dr Olga Mavis Rampersaud, Obstetrician and Gynaecologist, the first woman born in the British West Indies to obtain the MRCOG qualification. Aside from being my Great Aunt, Dr Rampersaud was an inspiration for her generation and all those that followed. Her belief that true satisfaction comes not only in receiving, but more so in giving back – was her driving force and has inspired my passion in STEM.

**Zoe Bolt**
Optimum

I'd like to collaborate with Atul Gawande because he combines medicine, clear thinking, and storytelling to improve how healthcare really works, focusing on patient safety, fairness, and end of life care, and together we could create simple, practical ideas that help doctors feel less burned out and help patients get safer, kinder, and better care.

**Molly Shoichet**
AmacaThera

I'm inspired by people who think differently. I love collaborating with Professors Cindi Morshead and Valerie Wallace (both at the University of Toronto), who bring their expertise in neuroscience to ours in bioengineering, allowing us to advance ideas faster. I love collaborating with my brother, Brian Shoichet (UCSF), who brings his expertise in drug design to ours in drug delivery.

**Charlotte Hepburne-Scott**
Optimum

I'd choose Professor David Kavanagh who is working on a revolutionary treatment for Complement 3 Glomerulopathy (C3G), a rare autoimmune kidney disease with a very poor prognosis which my nephew has been diagnosed with. I feel an affinity with the people whose work in Life Sciences is inspired by a personal experience – it gives me faith in the industry's motivation.

**Liz Shanahan**
Kingdom Therapeutics

Dame Bridget Ogilvie has always been the most inspirational supporter of women in science. I've witnessed the way she has supported and nurtured younger female scientists and protected them in many cases from what can be a very misogynistic environment. She is kind and thoughtful, supportive and inspirational in equal measure and her phenomenal contribution to the sciences in the UK has paved the way for so many of us.

**Wei Peng**
Crimson Gateway

I would collaborate with Dr. Jean Cui, a member of the U.S. National Academy of Engineering, whose leadership in developing cancer therapeutics such as crizotinib, lorlatinib, and repotrectinib at Pfizer and Turning Point (acquired by BMS) inspires me. Her ability to translate chemistry and biology into life-saving medicines fuels my passion for innovation and motivates my pursuit of impact in the biotech industry.

**Mo Noonan**
Nucleome Therapeutics

Elizabeth Blackwell, she was the first female M.D. in the US, the first female doctor on the British General Medical Council register and founded the first women's medical institutions in NY and London. She fought against societal views of what and how a woman should be. Her inspirational work on women's medical education, public health, gynaecology and hygiene forged a path for women in science and helped secure UK legal access for women in medicine. What a woman!

**Bita Sehat**
Trill Impact

Without hesitation, Mina Bissell. Long before systems biology was fashionable, she proved context matters, challenging gene-centric thinking with conviction in the male-dominated academic world of the 1950s-60s. I was fortunate to join her mentoring program early in my PhD. Her advice to always ask what question really matters still guides my science and investment thinking.

**Vici Rabbetts**
Optimum

I have been lucky to meet many inspiring women throughout my career, but I would have loved to meet Hedy Lamarr, whom I only recently discovered. As well as being considered the most beautiful woman in the world at the time, she also invented the precursor to GPS, Bluetooth, and Wi-Fi.

**Valerie Vanhooren**
ONA Therpaeutics

Dr. Sara Tolaney because she represents the kind of translational oncology that truly changes standards of care. Her work has helped redefine how we think about targeted therapies and antibody–drug conjugates, from isolated innovations to tools that can be thoughtfully integrated into treatment strategies. This aligns with Ona Therapeutics' mission, focusing on advancing first-in-class molecules that address tumour heterogeneity and resistance.

**Marianna Saporito**
Fibrocor Therapeutics

If I could collaborate with any scientist again, it would be Yvonne Will. She consistently challenged the status quo, encouraged bold thinking, and pushed teams to grow beyond their comfort zones. Yvonne's mentorship, creativity, and willingness to take smart risks elevated every project we worked on together and motivated people to take on bigger ideas with confidence.

**Philippa Egerton-Warburton**
Weatherden

Nobel Prize winner Demis Hassabis and his work on AlphaFold continues to inspire my career in STEM. Solving the 50-year-old "protein folding problem" using artificial intelligence shows an incredible application of AI to unlock a vast leap forward for drug design, development and understanding pathobiology. An innovation that truly saves time, money and more rapidly enables scientific progress.

**Yolanda Wilson-Barnes**
Poolbeg Pharma

If I could collaborate with one figure, it would be David Attenborough. Trained as a natural scientist, specialising in geology and zoology at Cambridge, he has set the gold standard for science communication by combining rigorous respect for evidence with clarity, authenticity, and emotional resonance. His ability to translate complex ideas about nature, wildlife, and preservation into stories people understand and care about closely reflects my own aspirations and approach to science communications.

**Christina Takke**
V-Bio Ventures

As a potential investor, the most rewarding experience is to explore together with young scientists how their research and inventions can generate value for society. In every conversation, there is an opportunity to learn more about science, discover different perspectives, and understand the personal motivations that drive individuals forward. For translating science into valuable products, the most important traits are openness, curiosity, and a fundamental trust in people.

**Claire Louise Noyce**
Hybridan

I would collaborate with Dame Jane Goodall, who revolutionised our understanding of primatology through perseverance and compassion; qualities which made her unpopular within the male-dominated field. Her devotion to chimpanzees challenged human exceptionalism and has influenced how we value our natural world. Jane's optimistic approach towards conservation, empowering young generations, is admirable. She died aged 91 on 1 October 2025.

**Rachel Abbott**
Pan Cancer T

I would collaborate with Rosalind Franklin. I started my own career in X ray crystallography and have always admired her scientific rigour and integrity. Her work helped transform biology, even if it wasn't fully recognised at the time. As we work to translate mechanistic insight into cancer immunotherapies at Pan Cancer T, her commitment to data quality continues to inspire me.

**Nara Daubeney**
Phaim Pharma

My inspiration of choice is Andrea Ghez, UCLA astrophysicist who proved that a black hole exists in our Milky Way and redefined the tools for measuring the movement of stars. She is only the fourth woman to have won a physics Nobel.  Passion for discovery drives my desire to seek out groundbreaking therapies; my love of astrophysics is its foundation.

**Nina Schultz**
Vesper Bio

I was fortunate to meet Malin Wennström in the very beginning of my scientific career. Her passion for the unknown, together with her contagious and kind mind inspired me to stay curious and to dare to be bold. She has created a lab with an incredible atmosphere, supporting researchers and driving innovation. Allowing innovation, neuroscience and well-being to go hand in hand, I would always say yes to working with Malin.

**Melissa Simon**
Wieland Capital

If I could collaborate with any scientists, I would choose Rosalind Franklin and Özlem Türeci. Franklin's vital contributions to the discovery of DNA were long overlooked, and I deeply respect the resilience she showed navigating a male-dominated scientific world. I admire Özlem Türeci as a brilliant researcher translating groundbreaking science into companies, ensuring that innovative treatments reach patients and improve lives across the globe.

**Sylvia Wimmer**
Heidelberg Pharma

In addition to her scientific achievements and breakthroughs, I admire Marie Curie for her personal qualities. She was intelligent, courageous, and never lost faith in herself or her work. It is inspiring to work with people who are so enthusiastic about science and who do not give up despite all the obstacles and challenges they might face.

**Poonam Malik**
Biotech MedTech
Entrepreneur & Investor

I would collaborate with Marie Curie for her fearless pursuit of discovery against all odds. Her resilience reminds me that science and innovation however slow, uncertain, and undervalued - thrives on courage as much as intellect. As a woman entrepreneurial leader in life sciences, I strive to build ventures with equitable recognition that challenge limits, translate research into emerging technologies and deliver generational impact with real-world health solutions, inspiring the next generation.

**Carolyn Cross**
Ondine Biomedical

I would collaborate with Dr. Ignaz Semmelweis, whose groundbreaking insights on hand hygiene were tragically dismissed. By empowering birthing mothers with this grassroots knowledge, we could have bypassed institutional resistance. Mobilising those most at risk would have created immediate demand for sanitary care, accelerating the adoption of handwashing and preventing countless unnecessary deaths decades before it became a medical standard.

**Josie Gayton**
Precirix

I really admire Sarah Gilbert, co-developer of the Oxford-AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine. She is a pioneering scientist whose work saved millions of lives globally. Her expertise in vaccinology and rapid-response innovation demonstrates exceptional leadership and collaboration skills. Partnering with her would mean working with a visionary committed to solving urgent health challenges, driving impactful research, and advancing global health equity.

**Francesca Cordeiro**
Novai

I would choose Ida Mann. She was a pioneering ophthalmologist who combined rigorous science with a deep commitment to patient care and public health, particularly in preventing blindness. She understood that discovery only matters if it reaches people, a translational mindset ahead of its time, and remains a powerful inspiration for how we approach innovation at Novai.

**Susan Hill**
Mestag Therapeutics

Professor Margaret Stanley OBE at the Department of Pathology in Cambridge was a lecturer when I was an undergrad in the 1990s. Margaret's research clarified how high-risk HPV types drive the development of cervical cancer and how host immune responses influence persistence and progression. The first trials demonstrating efficacy against persistent HPV infection were "landmark moments" that helped convince the world that vaccination could prevent cancer.

**Ena Prosser**
Fountain Healthcare

I'm a biologist and I admire Dame Jocelyn Bell-Burrell PhD who is a Northern Ireland physicist. Her PhD work went on to win others a Nobel Prize for Radio Pulsars, she later received the Breakthrough Prize of $3M and donated this money to establish a fund to help female, minority and refugee students to become research physicists.

**Lara Campana**
Resolution Therapeutics

I'd love to collaborate with Rita Levi-Montalcini, the mother of neuro-regeneration and Nobel Prize winner. Doing groundbreaking science while in Italy women still couldn't vote, having to escape Nazi persecution, and emigrating to the US to chase her dream, she inspired me to see challenges as opportunities. I think we would just hit it off with a project at the cross-section of immunity and neurodegeneration, solving some challenging scientific puzzles together.

**Ariadna Montero**
Orikine Bio

It would be Elisenda Bou-Balust (CEO of Cala and former CTO and founder of Vilynx). She represents the kind of leadership I deeply admire: someone at the forefront of AI innovation who is able to turn ambitious concepts into real products with impact. Beyond her technical excellence, she is an inspiring example of how to lead in technology with know-how, passion, courage, and perseverance. What resonates most with me is her mission-driven approach — building technologies that contribute to a better world.

**Supriya Mathur**
Communications Specialist

Witnessing CRISPR's emergence over a decade ago, this idea of "genetic scissors" was pure scientific awe. The partnership of Jennifer Doudna and Emmanuelle Charpentier highlights both the impact of women in STEM and the power of collaboration. Their curiosity and vision created tools capable of healing what once seemed unfixable. From their 2012 paper to the 2020 Nobel Prize, their work inspires future scientists to turn laboratory breakthroughs into real clinical treatments.

**Isabelle Adbou**
Optimum

I would choose Christine Hamers-Casterman, who co-discovered that camelids (including alpacas and llamas) naturally produce unusual heavy-chain-only antibodies – the foundation of today's nanobody technology. That insight reshaped antibody engineering, enabling smaller, more stable binders for research, diagnostics, and therapeutics.

**Caroline Gaynor**
Lightstone Ventures

I would collaborate with Dorothy Hodgkin, who won the Nobel Prize for determining the molecular structures of penicillin and vitamin B12. She later mapped the complex structure of insulin. Her work allows us to synthesise life-saving medicines today. Working with her would show young girls that "seeing" the invisible through chemistry can unlock the world's healing secrets.

**María Poveda**
Inveready

I would collaborate with Katalin Karikó for her pioneering work in therapeutic mRNA. I'm excited to explore next-generation mRNA therapies for high-unmet-need indications, including rare and immune-mediated diseases, leveraging my biotechnology / biomedical background and life sciences investment role.

**Montse Vendrell**
Asabys Partners

I would love to collaborate with Katalin Karikó for her resilience and determination in pursuing her dream of giving mRNA the pre-eminent role it has today. Thanks to her work, the world had timely access to COVID-19 mRNA vaccines. Despite the lack of support by her peers, she never gave up. She has been later recognized with the Nobel Prize.

**Joanne Lant**
Lant Medical

If I could collaborate with Hippocrates on the gut, we'd probably rewrite medicine from the inside out. We'd blend his timeless insight "All disease begins in the gut" with modern microbiome science. It would be ancient wisdom meeting cutting-edge biology; showing that the future of health was already whispered in the past.

**Katya Smirnyagina**
Oxford Science Enterprise

At OSE we are fortunate to work with many outstanding Oxford academics. One of them is Professor of Medicinal Chemistry Angela Russell. Her research focuses on discovering and translating new molecules and mechanisms to manipulate cell fate, particularly for degenerative diseases. Angie is a driving force behind several entrepreneurial initiatives at Oxford University inspiring students and academics.

**Anna Lind Hansen**
MinervaX

I would love to go exploring with Mary Anning. Where others saw rocks, she saw a whole world of hidden potential. She allowed her curiosity to guide her path and through sharing her discoveries, she changed the world.

**Helen Philpott**
Bionical Emas

Gertrude Elion's revolutionary scientific approach to drug development, and how the medical research landscape was enhanced because of her dedicated work, is inspiring. Her legacy contributed to my passion for Pharmacology. Her life's mission: to alleviate human suffering, resonates with my job role and company's vision to bring life-changing medicines to patients around the world through our early access programmes.

**Denise Scots-Knight**
Mereo Biopharma

I would have loved to work with Rita Levi-Montalcini. Her experience mirrors so much of today's biotech reality. When institutions shut her out, she built her own lab and followed the science anyway; work that led to the discovery of nerve growth factor and a Nobel Prize. In a sector where bold ideas can struggle for funding, her defence of public science investment well into her 90s feels relevant. Curiosity and resilience are timeless drivers of progress.

**Susan Singer**
Ottimo Pharma

Suni Williams is inspirational to me as a local resident of Needham, Massachusetts, and as a powerful example of how individuals from local communities can achieve extraordinary success. Her remarkable accomplishments as an astronaut reflect exceptional dedication, leadership, and perseverance, and demonstrate the profound impact one person can have on medicine, science and humanity.

**Tina Flatau**
Sixfold Bio

Dr Eric Topol, cardiologist and scientist, has led the Scripps Research Translational Institute for nearly 20 years, and exemplifies the translational thinking that makes life science research possible. He shares, scrutinises and assesses insightful datasets and analyses, and illustrates that our curiosity, our rigour and our quality of thought define us as scientists, not just the data we generate.

**Aimee Clarke**
Brain Tumour Research

I would love to collaborate with Rita Levi-Montalcini, whose discovery of nerve growth factor transformed how we understand brain development and repair. Her work underpins much of modern neuroscience, and I find it inspiring how she pushed forward despite major barriers as a woman in STEM. Learning from her would be incredibly exciting, especially in exploring how bold research can drive real progress for people affected by brain tumours.

**Katie Flint**
Optimum

I'd love to work with Dr Felice Jacka, who's leading the way in nutritional psychiatry – how our diet shapes mental and brain health. I've always found her work really interesting, and with mental and neurological disorders continuing to rise, even as new treatment options emerge, her drive to understand the root causes really resonates with me.

**Lara Scheer**
AMSilk

I would collaborate with Rosalind Franklin, as she was not only a brilliant scientist who was overlooked simply because she was a woman, but also politically active in supporting refugees. Her story has shown me how important it is for us FLINTA scientists to support each other, as her story is still representative of many others today. She inspires me to raise my voice and continue to educate myself about feminism.

**Ursula Gompels**
Virothera

Barbara McClintock, Geneticist, Nobel Prize for Physiology 1983. Reminder that fundamental discoveries can come from unexpected places and be transformational, in this case transposons ‘jumping genes’ discovery, now recognised as key drivers of genome evolution underpinning genetic diversity, gene regulation, speciation, virus origins, also some drug resistance and tumour formation - all fundamental principles and foundations for modern medicines development.

**Elena Bates**
Optimum

Jean Purdy was a pioneer of fertility treatment and advancing women’s healthcare, pivotal to the development of IVF, and until recently her contributions and impact on women’s health research were not recognised.

**Asel Sartbaeva**
Ensilicated Technologies

When I started my PhD at Cambridge, I learned about Mary Anning after visiting the Sedgwick Museum for the first time. As early as 12, she started collecting fossils. From those fossils, she made detailed sketches and identified several very important unknown species among others. Today I imagine her collecting fossils at Lyme with a smile on her face.

**Ellie Reston**
Optimum

I would choose Katherine Johnson. Her extraordinary mathematical talent and calm precision under pressure helped send astronauts into space and reshape NASA’s future. Collaborating with her would mean learning from a brilliant mind who broke cultural barriers, solved complex problems, and proved that determination and intellect can change history.

**Eleanor Cooper**
Optimum

Jennifer Doudna and Emmanuelle Charpentier are who I would choose to collaborate with. The pair won the Nobel Prize for their pioneering working into CRISPR-Cas9, a precise, efficient gene-editing technology that has revolutionised modern genetics and opened new possibilities for treating genetic diseases. I admire Jennifer and Emmanuelle's ethical leadership and dedication to responsible innovation.

**Vareen Outhonesack**
Optimum

I would have collaborated with Judith Love Cohen, who was an electrical engineer that worked on several space programs systems throughout her career. Cohen worked on the team that developed the Abort-Guidance System that helped saved the crew of the Apollo 13 mission, returning them safely to Earth after an oxygen tank exploded aboard the spacecraft.

**Aoife Minihan**
Optimum

I would choose to collaborate with Tu Youyou, Nobel Prize-winning malariologist and pharmaceutical chemist, her work has saved millions of lives. She led a breakthrough effort to find a new treatment for malaria by carefully studying ancient Chinese medical texts and then applying modern scientific methods to isolate artemisinin. I admire her courage and dedication - she volunteered to be the first human subject to test artemisinin’s safety.

**Katherine Bliss**
Optimum

Marie Curie would be my choice. Her unwavering commitment to understanding radioactivity and her devotion to discovery propelled some of the most important breakthroughs in science. Her drive continues to define scientific excellence.

**Nellie Stephens**
Optimum

I'd choose Katalin Karikó. Her pioneering work stabilising mRNA transformed a concept into one of the most powerful medical technologies of our time. Her creativity and scientific courage paved the way for mRNA vaccines and therapies that have reshaped global health.

**Rosanna McBain**
Optimum

I would collaborate with someone from my field of study – Helen Ball. Her lectures, at Durham University, on reproductive health, and her research into infant and parent sleep have stayed with me across all areas of my life. She had a clarity of thought and strength of conviction that was infectious. A joy to listen to.

**Abbie Murphy**
Optimum

I would collaborate with Thomas Starzl, a pioneer of organ transplantation. I'm not a scientist, so I'd mostly listen in awe and thank him for saving my aunt's life. She received a kidney transplant over 40 years ago, and thanks to his breakthroughs in immunosuppression, she is still thriving today.

# Listen now to Optimum's Women & Girls in Science Day podcast special

**Mary Clark**
Optimum

**Victoria Taylor**
Medicxi

**Bonnie van Wilgenburg**
Monograph Capital

**Noga Yerushalmi**
M Ventures


Subscribe to the show on Spotify or Apple Podcasts to never miss an ep, or visit optimumcomms.com


Optimum
Strategic Communications