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Wider diversity of viewpoints

Having more women in the science, technology and engineering fields will generate a wider diversity of viewpoints and lead to better outcomes, said Associate Professor Sierin Lim.

Dr Lim, from Nanyang Technological University's (NTU) School of Chemical and Biomedical Engineering, pointed to the design of car safety devices as an example of why it is vital to address a range of needs.

A 2011 study published in the American Journal of Public Health found that women are 47 per cent more likely to suffer severe injuries in a car crash as safety features are often designed for men. The reason: differences in women's body structures, neck strength and musculature are often not accounted for in safety device design.

Dr Lim, who spoke to The Straits Times last Friday, initiated the Women in Engineering, Science and Technology Symposium in 2014.

The symposium, which invites women from industry and academia to share their work and innovations, was held again in January with a full house of about 150 participants. It will now be held every two years.

Its plenary speaker this year was evolutionary engineer Frances Arnold, who in 2016 became the first woman to win the Millennium Technology Prize, awarded for outstanding technological innovations. She was honoured for pioneering directed evolution, a method of protein engineering that mimics natural evolution.

Dr Lim hopes profiling these achievers will inspire younger women to remain in the field.

She also pushed for the Women in Engineering and Technology Conference Grants, which were first given out this year by NTU's College of Engineering. These offer up to $3,000 to allow a recipient to attend an overseas conference in their respective field to present their own work.

Ms Tan Wen See, 28, a final-year PhD student who was one of the six recipients this year, said: "It will provide me the opportunity to share my work and learn from industry leaders and world-class scientists."

Ms Tan, who recently submitted her thesis in 3D printing and membrane technology, hopes to attend MELPRO 2018, an international conference on membrane and electromembrane processes to be held in Prague in May.

Gracia Lee