Professor Inspired by Passion for Women’s Health, Faith and Family

College of Medicine - Phoenix
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Dr. Maria Manriquez, professor in the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology at the UA College of Medicine - Phoenix [1], grew up in the small town of Kearny, Arizona. She married at 16 and gave birth at age 17 to her first daughter. She didn't let the responsibilities of a new family stop her from pursuing her dream, though, and earned her nursing degree.

"You have to have champions in your life who believe in you and who encourage you to believe in yourself," she says. "I was lucky to be grounded. My first child grounded me quickly. I had people in my life who held that stick up high and did not let me crawl under it."

Her many years of experience in obstetrics began in 1986, when she worked as a registered nurse in the labor and delivery department at Desert Samaritan Hospital (now Banner Desert Medical Center).

She loved her health care career, especially dealing with patients, so Manriquez decided to "take the leap" and began prerequisite courses for medical school. She was accepted into the UA College of Medicine in Tucson. During her second year of medical school, after her second child was born, she commuted daily from Phoenix to Tucson for her studies. Fortunately, she was able to complete her third and fourth years of medical school training in Phoenix, when the college opened an office on Indian School Road [2].

After receiving her medical degree in 1998, Manriquez completed her residency training at Good Samaritan Regional Medical Center (now known as Banner - University Medical Center Phoenix) in 2000. She joined the UA College of Medicine - Phoenix in 2004 as obstetrics-gynecology site director and as an assistant professor. She became director of the college's Obstetrics and Gynecology Clerkship [3] in 2009 and started the Pathway Scholars Program [4], with members of the first class beginning their studies in 2014. Manriquez also serves as the Cultural Competency theme [5] director and is the interim associate dean of clinical curriculum.

The Pathway Scholars Program provides an opportunity for Arizona residents who may have experienced unusual educational challenges in preparing for medical school. These applicants possess attributes that would make them superb physicians, but may lack the necessary skills needed to succeed in medical school. Manriquez says she was inspired to establish the program to provide these applicants with the tools to achieve their dreams.
“What is most gratifying is watching people who didn’t think they had an opportunity to be all that they could be realize that opportunity,” she says. “Getting into medical school is tough in general, and when you’ve had a lot of disadvantages in your life, being persistent and able to persevere through that and having a support system is very special. They are very appreciative and humble.”

Manriquez says former College of Medicine Phoenix Dean Stuart Flynn was one of her mentors, and he asked her to develop the program.

"I had sat on the student progress committee when I was a medical student and saw that some students didn’t have the support system they needed to be successful in medical school," she says. "If we are going to recruit for diversity, and for physicians who come from backgrounds where vulnerable populations come from, we have to provide academic learning support, while maintaining high standards."

Outside of her roles in medicine, Manriquez says family is most important to her. She is married to Moses Sanchez and has three children. "I like to say I birthed my best friend," she says of her daughter Bernadine Sadauskas, who is the department administrator for College of Medicine Phoenix professor Frederic Zenhausern [6] and the UA Center for Applied NanoBioscience and Medicine [7], which Zenhausern directs.

"We live next door to each other," Manriquez says of Bernadine. "We opened up the backyard between our houses. My three grandchildren live next door. We are well-rooted in our faith. Outside of that, I love to travel, and I like to write. I enjoy what I do in women's health."

Mike Foley, professor and chair of the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology at the College of Medicine Phoenix says Manriquez brings valuable life experience.

"Dr. Manriquez is an extremely valuable member of our College of Medicine Phoenix team," Foley says. "Her insight from her life experiences working as a nurse, going to medical school, doing a residency in obstetrics and gynecology and her work as a leader on the national level brings so much insight to our department and our medical school."

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