

Mona Gohara, MD



Deep Roots

Dr. Gohara notes that her Ivy League training is just part of her medical education. “Yale has a tremendous pedigree, and although it was not where my medical degree started, it is truly where I was given a chance,” she says, noting that she earned her medical degree at Medical College of Ohio. “My mentors and teachers at Yale were trailblazing women like Dr. Jean Bolognia, who literally wrote the book *Dermatology*.” Based on her experiences at Yale, Dr. Gohara says she now focuses on supporting others with opportunities.

Born to physicians who emigrated from Egypt, Mona Gohara, MD was always encouraged to study medicine. Her initial focus on women’s health shifted to dermatology—“the best really of all of medicine wrapped up perfectly in this sub-specialty.”

A trusted source for the media and an author and lecturer, she is in private practice and holds a faculty appointment at Yale: “It helps me to remain in tune with what’s happening at the cutting edge of academic dermatology and affords me the opportunity to give back and teach the residents in the capacity that I was taught. For me, it’s the best of both worlds.”

Why are you active in advocacy?

Dr. Gohara: First of all, I’m a woman of color. So this is something that has always been important to me. I happened to have grown up in a privileged environment, but oftentimes am abruptly reminded that I’m a petite woman of color. Sometimes I walk into a room and I tell somebody they have poison ivy and they don’t believe me, because, perhaps, what I look like. In addition to my own personal experience of being a woman of color doctor, I’m aware of the dismal statistic that dermatology is the second least diverse specialty.

Those two things made me really interested in moving the needle. And I have done so. I worked with the Women’s Dermatologic Society (WDS) and Dr. Pearl Grimes—another trailblazing woman in dermatology—to create the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee for WDS, wherein we have held multiple industry-sponsored events for underrepresented in medicine med students. These events help med students navigate the dermatology application process. Summer research fellowships for med students and dermatology residents, respectively, give the opportunity to get involved with academic dermatology, but also, and probably more importantly, become mentored by dermatologists to create an ongoing relationship.

I also chair the American Society for Dermatologic Surgery’s DEI Work Group, with Dr. Omar Ibrahim, and work with a sizable group of committed colleagues on this project. We’ve done webinars that address everything from microaggressions to LGBTQ+ and trans issues. We’ve done educational things with the media, trying to get more skin of color experts in front of the media. And we’re having the first ever session at the ASDS

devoted to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

We’ve tried to rally people to address legislative restrictions that are happening in many states for trans individuals. This is really comprehensive. We’re not focusing on one area of DEI; we’re trying to be broad and have a macroscopic view of what’s going on and do as much as we can to move the needle.

How do you respond in a situation like you described when patients doubt your expertise?

Dr. Gohara: It angers and frustrates me very much when things like that happen, but anger and frustration don’t solve anything. So I re-shift my thinking to understand where the person may be coming from and just stay firm in my own beliefs. Whereas, as a younger dermatologist I would recruit one of the older, white males in my group to give an opinion, now if a patient challenges a very straightforward diagnosis that I am confident in, I just stand firm and I don’t waiver. So I don’t let anger or frustration take over. I let my confidence take over.

How do you make time to do what’s important to you?

Dr. Gohara: Particularly with social media, you can have professional FOMO. You look at colleagues and think, “They’re doing that? They’re with that company?” You have to keep yourself grounded and not let “fear of missing out” take over.

You also have to prioritize what’s really important. I think for me more than anything, the pandemic made me realize that in one blink of an eye, within one week, our lives completely changed—as cliché as it is—from having not a care in the world to our lives and livelihood being on the line. I think it’s important to keep reminding ourselves of prioritization and family; whatever may be your individual priorities should be the focus.

Any advice for up-and-coming dermatologists?

Dr. Gohara: In any situation, we need to look to our left, look to our right, see who’s around us and see how we can lift each other up. Extend a hand and lift each other up and avoid at all costs any potential professional or personal scenario where we are putting each other down. ■

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