

Maria H. Berrocal, MD

Dr. Berrocal is an Assistant Professor at the University of Puerto Rico School of Medicine in San Juan.

1. How has coming from a family of retina specialists influenced your research?

It has been wonderful for me to have a father who was the first retina specialist in Puerto Rico, and also the first retina fellow at Bascom Palmer Eye Institute under Edward W.D. Norton, MD. Through my father's eyes, I was able to see the evolution of the field of retina from scleral buckles to central retinal vein occlusion (CRVO); the development of laser photocoagulation, fluorescein angiography, and optical coherence tomography (OCT); vitrectomy, and now microincisional surgery. It was quite humbling to meet at a very young age the pioneers of the field—Dr. Norton; J. Donald M. Gass, MD; Charles L. Schepens, MD; Harvey A. Lincoff, MD; Stanley Chang, MD; and D. Jackson Coleman, MD; among others. It is also important to keep in mind the challenges and struggles that retina specialists had to face in the past with limited technology. Many of the advances that we take for granted today were the result of difficult trial-and-error innovations. My sister Nina is also a retina specialist, and in true Latin style we were very involved in our father's career while growing up. We worked in his office during summers and went with him on postoperative follow-up visits on the weekend (All ophthalmic surgeries were hospitalized in the 70s.) At present, it is great to be able to discuss ideas and cases with both my sister and father and receive the invaluable wealth of 50 years of experience in the field.

2. Discuss the Pan-American Collaborative Retina Study (PACORES) and what it has meant for research efforts in Latin America.

PACORES began as a group of friends who decided to get together and collaborate on research projects. Latin America has a wealth of distinct pathologies as well as a significant number of patients. Consolidating our efforts allows us to perform studies with significant numbers of patients, which

makes the data much more relevant. The concept of PACORES is important because it has made people realize that cooperation is possible and that good research can be done in Latin America, despite limited economic resources.

3. What advice do you have for colleagues who want to publish their research but struggle to find time to do so?

The biggest challenge is finding time to manage a busy practice and have time for research. In this sense, collaboration is necessary. In a group, there are persons who like writing, others who can provide cases, some who can do statistics, and others who provide great ideas. Collaboration makes everything possible—and, of course, having an understanding family helps too.

4. What are the major challenges facing health care in Puerto Rico in this new decade?

Puerto Rico, like most of the world, is in a major economic recession. This has affected health care at all levels. Although our government provides universal health care, many expensive treatments are not covered, and patients do not have the economic resources to pay for them. In Puerto Rico, the biggest health problem is diabetes and its complications. We have one of the highest incidences of type 2 diabetes in the world. Diabetic care must be optimized through education because strict control of glucose is rare. More resources must be invested in education and prevention.

5. Describe your ideal vacation destination.

My favorite destinations are the Virgin Islands in the Caribbean. The water is turquoise and warm, and the sand is white. The ideal yearly vacation is with my extended family and close friends, a tradition we have kept for 15 years. Friendships are most important. They are the pillars that support you throughout the ups and downs of life. ■

