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Resident Spotlight: Monica Aguilar, PGY-3

Family Medicine, Henry Ford Rochester Hospital, Rochester



Residency Times: Where did you grow up, and where did you complete medical school?

Monica Aguilar: I grew up in Honduras and later moved to California, where I pursued both my undergraduate and graduate studies. I earned a master’s degree in Social Work and was employed as a social worker for a foster care agency for several years. During that time, I also started my own family. (That’s my husband Billy and my daughters Elena and Billie in the photo.)

The dream of becoming a physician never left me, and I decided to take a bold step toward achieving that goal, enrolling in a career-changing post-bac program at UC Berkeley while balancing a full-time job and parenting two girls under the age of two. Recognizing the need for a more focused path, my family and I made the decision to move to Nicaragua, where I attended medical school.

After completing all the required tests and steps to practice medicine in the US, I matched into the WSUSOM’s Family Medicine program, where I am currently a PGY-3. It has been a challenging yet deeply fulfilling journey, and I’m enjoying every moment of this phase in my career.

RT: Why did you decide to pursue primary care?

MA: I found myself drawn to the broad scope of medicine, enjoying every specialty I encountered. My background feels like a reflection of what family medicine represents: a blend of versatility, connection, and coordination.

I frequently take on the role of organizing care and collaborating with others to find solutions. I have a genuine curiosity about people—their stories, how they got to where they are, and most importantly, how I can help them. I’m not afraid to admit when I don’t know the answer but am always ready to work hard and seek help to figure it out.

My life experiences—relocating multiple times, balancing parenting with education, and my prior career in social work—have shaped my adaptability and empathy. These qualities, combined with my love for learning and connecting with others, ultimately resulted in my decision to pursue family medicine.

RT: What are your clinical or teaching interests?

MA: I have a special interest in women's health, particularly the physical and mental health challenges that come with aging. I aspire to practice in an outpatient setting that fosters growth and allows me to apply my passions while building strong, long-term relationships with my patients.

I believe meaningful change takes time, and my approach to care emphasizes patience and unwavering support. I seek to guide patients through their unique journeys by providing them with the tools and resources they need to achieve their goals. Whether it's managing chronic conditions, addressing mental health, or navigating life transitions, I want to empower my patients to take charge of their health.

Someday I would love to be involved in training residents and guiding other international medical graduates through the process of practicing medicine in the US. Having walked that path myself, I know how valuable mentorship can be, and I hope to provide that same support to others in the future.

RT: This past October, you completed a rotation at the Scotsdale Women's Center & Family Planning in Detroit. How did this come about, and what were the particular challenges providing patient care at this site?

MA: Scotsdale is a Detroit-based clinic that specializes in both surgical and medication (pill) abortions. It serves the communities of Detroit, Dearborn, Southfield, and surrounding areas in Michigan and Ohio, providing essential reproductive healthcare services.

Abortion training is not offered as part of my curriculum, so arranging this rotation required the support of my Program Director and mentors. With their guidance, I was able to design and plan this elective, and funding for the rotation was provided through a grant from the Medical Students for Choice (MSFC), a national organization with a chapter in WSUSOM.

The rotation was an invaluable experience, as I had the opportunity to work with incredible doctors and staff who prioritize patient choice, autonomy, and health.

One of the most significant challenges at Scotsdale is the lack of access to funding. The center operates as a self-pay facility, making it difficult for individuals with limited resources to access the care they need. Financial assistance is available through the National Abortion Federation, but the systemic issue of barriers to reproductive healthcare remains, particularly for underserved populations.

Family medicine inherently includes contraception, pregnancy options counseling, prenatal care, deliveries, and abortion services within its scope. Unfortunately, most family physicians in our area do not receive training in abortion care, which I see as a significant gap in our education. I am committed to providing patient-centered care that respects individuals' reproductive choices and autonomy, regardless of my own viewpoint or beliefs.

In today's ever-changing social and political landscape, where laws and regulations are frequently shifting, it's critical for healthcare providers to have the tools and knowledge to support patients, even

if they don't practice certain services themselves. Patient advocacy is just as important as patient care, and it's an essential component of being a family doctor. My time at Scotsdale allowed me to connect with like-minded professionals dedicated to offering comprehensive reproductive healthcare, and it reaffirmed my belief that training in all aspects of our scope is vital to the future of family medicine.

RT: What are your plans after completing residency?

MA: I plan to take some time off to travel and recharge before beginning an outpatient position that offers a healthy work-life balance.

RT: Do you have advice for young physicians interested in family medicine or primary care?

MA: My advice would be to stay curious and embrace the diversity that comes with this specialty. Family Medicine allows you to build long-term relationships with patients and be involved in all aspects of their lives. Be open to learning continuously—whether it's through formal education or just talking to your patients. Also, don't be afraid to advocate for your patients, especially in areas where there are gaps in care. Family medicine offers incredible opportunities to make a difference in both individual lives and communities.

RT: What do you do to maintain wellness?

MA: I focus on spending quality time with my family and loved ones, which helps me maintain balance. I also make time for friends, whether it's over coffee, a drink, or a long phone call. Traveling is another priority—visiting family who live far away and exploring new places. Taking my girls to locations that are meaningful to us helps maintain our connection to our background. For me, it's all about enjoying the ride, finding moments to relax, and appreciating the journey both in and outside of work.

RT: What's the one book you believe all physicians (or residents) should read?

MA: I would suggest reading something for fun. No one specific book. During medical school and the first two years of residency, I felt like I was always reading something to study or because I had to. Recently, I rediscovered the joy of reading for pleasure. Join a book club! Occupy your mind with other things—after all, we can always do a quick UpToDate check if we need a refresher!



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