

UPDATE | January 3, 2018

Meet Our Advocates: Dr. Ben Brown

Where are you from?

I grew up in Boston and Providence. Today, I live and work in Chicago.

What's your specialty or area of expertise?

I am an obstetrician/gynecologist, currently in the second year of a fellowship in family planning. My clinical interests include caring for high-risk and medically-complex obstetric patients as well as providing full-spectrum contraception and abortion care.

What first inspired you to become a doctor?

Before I could put words to it, I can remember being intrigued by watching my doctor work. She was not the stereotypical effusive pediatrician, but rather a very earnest



communicator. She would come into the exam room, look me squarely in the eye, and ask how things were going. Then she would listen intently before offering some soft-spoken and thoughtful guidance. I became a doctor in large part because I had grown up seeing how meaningful the doctor-patient relationship could be. I saw what an obvious privilege and joy it was for my pediatrician to get to be part of her patients' lives. I am incredibly grateful that my patients are willing to share some of the most intensely happy and challenging moments of their lives with me.

What story about one of your patients most sticks with you?

I cared for a patient who had made a multi-hour trip to town in order to see us. I'll call her Lindsey. She had used the last of her savings to pay for a bus ticket and the procedure itself. She didn't have anything left over to afford a hotel or food for the two days she would be with us. Our team worked for hours to help find Lindsey a safe place to stay. One of my colleagues even brought her a spare set of clothes in the morning because she didn't have anything to change into after her surgery. I am so proud of the way our team cared for all of Lindsey's needs — social and financial, as well as medical — but nobody should have to go through this kind of hardship just to access health care.

What current policy issue especially motivates you to be an advocate?

I am a Quaker, and my religion motivates me to be the doctor I am. As a person of faith, I take it as a special kind of insult when people use their own religion to tell other people that their values are wrong. For example, when policies privilege a medical provider's conscience over that of the patient. When I come into the exam room, there are at least two consciences at work: mine and the patient's. Religious refusal laws that allow medical providers to deny patients access to care denigrate patients' own lives of faith and ignore their conscientious decision-making. I see it as my responsibility as a doctor of faith to advocate for more inclusive policies that honor patients' values.

Who is your social justice hero?

Leonardo Boff. He's a Brazilian liberation theologian who has written extensively on the

need for the Church to deepen its roots and engagement with marginalized people. He was one of the main proponents of a radical ecclesial outlook in the 1960s that envisioned a richer, formative role for the laity in Catholic practice. He has written very eloquently about why inequality and structural violence are problems of religious significance that by definition ought to be of concern to the Church.

Every week, our Meet Our Advocates series showcases the talents and passion of one of our doctors and finds out, in their own words, what inspires them to be physician-advocates. Ben Brown, MD, is a member of the Leadership Training Academy Class of 2018.

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