



UPDATE | December 20, 2017

Meet Our Advocates: Dr. Carrie Griffin



Where are you from?

Portsmouth, Virginia—part of the Tidewater area along the Chesapeake Bay.

What's your specialty or area of expertise?

I'm a family medicine physician who specializes in maternity care and reproductive health. I also work in a perinatal substance abuse clinic, and treating addiction in pregnancy is currently a large part of my practice.

I grew up with a mother who used her legal practice as a vehicle toward social justice and volunteered in our community for housing rights, small business owners, and victims of intimate partner violence. She taught me that doing good work in the world means using your gifts in service to others. That legacy aside, I never imagined being a doctor when I grew up. I spent my early twenties advocating for social reform and women's rights publicly, and studying yoga and meditation personally. I realized medicine could offer a practical path toward bringing compassion and justice into the world. When I learned about osteopathic medicine—which recognizes the innate capacity of the individual to heal and honors the mind-body connection as the foundation from which modern medicine is learned—I knew I had found a vocational home.

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

With full recognition that there are a thousand or more stories I could tell, I'll share a recent experience that stuck with me. I met a woman at Planned Parenthood who had an eight-year-old son and a six-month-old daughter at home and a brand new job that gave her family health insurance for the first time, and she had just learned that she was six weeks pregnant. While discussing her options, her cell phone rang and she asked to answer it—it was her older child's school. She proceeded to have a tense and tearful conversation with a school administrator. When she hung up the phone, she sobbed. Her son's father had physically abused both of them, and her son was constantly acting out at school and home. She knew they needed more help and had been trying to get them into family counseling, but then she had moved to our city. She was "on a waiting list" at a private practice she had called once but didn't know what else to do. We were able to provide her with an abortion and an IUD as well as connect her to a non-profit child therapy program through the local university. Her story reminded me that women exist not only as themselves but in families and communities, and the best care for them needs to be tailored to their full selves.

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

are gone, and sometimes sleep in the parking lot of the clinic at night because they are too tired to drive back and cannot afford a place to stay. The incredible weight of this undue burden on women only further clarifies for me that women need to have the full range of reproductive health care services available in their hometowns. This is an issue of parity—not politics.

Who is your social justice hero?

As a child I had biographies of Rosa Parks and Sojourner Truth that I read on repeat. More recently, I've been reading Martin Luther King, Jr.'s essays and am awed by the depth and transformative power of his nonviolent philosophy. And somehow I've only just been introduced to Rudolf Virchow's social medicine work: "The physicians are the natural attorneys of the poor, and the social problems should largely be solved by them." Preach.

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. Carrie Griffin, DO, is a member of the Leadership Training Academy Class of 2018.

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