



UPDATE | July 5, 2018

Meet Our Advocates: Dr. Kohar Der Simonian



What are your gender pronouns?

She/her/hers

Where are you from?

Waterville, Maine, a small town in central Maine.





Full spectrum family medicine physician, including obstetrics

What first inspired you to become a doctor?

I had two neighbors growing up who had a very rare illness, Niemann-Pick Disease. They traveled to and from the National Institutes of Health several times a month, and I was fascinated by the stories they told me about the doctors who were working hard to find a cure for their disease. It got me very interested in science, research, and medicine.

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

When I was a second year resident, part of our ob/gyn rotation was to spend eight weeks at the Planned Parenthood through the Training in Early Abortion for Comprehensive Healthcare (TEACH) program. Before starting the rotation, I knew I was interested in “women’s health” but hadn’t felt particularly pulled in one direction. On one of my last days at Planned Parenthood, I met a young patient. She was 22 years old at the time. She brought her 10-month-old baby to the appointment for her abortion, and a friend held the baby during her procedure. She was pretty quiet the entire time, but I noticed that at some points she had silent tears falling down her cheeks. After the procedure was complete, I stepped back into the room to update her. As I was telling her that everything had gone well, she reached out for my hand and grabbed it and squeezed it, and said “thank you.” I honestly felt like a spark of electricity when she did that. It was as if we had a deep connection, and in those two words she was saying thank you for more than just performing her procedure safely and with compassion. She was saying thank you for giving her a chance to be a better parent to her 10-month-old. And thank you for not judging her decision. As a resident, I had become accustomed to patients and family members complaining about cold hospital food, not enough pain medications, and that they wanted to see the “real doctor.” Her simple gratitude really struck a nerve. I left that day feeling like maybe continuing with this type of work was what I wanted to do. I still think about her,





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

Gosh, at this point given our political climate and government, there are too many to choose from. I am driven by doing what is morally right. Currently, I am giving voice to keeping families together during this border crisis and war on immigrants. I will **always** be committed to promoting access to birth control and keeping abortion, safe, legal, and in the hands of women.

Who is your social justice hero?

I think my answer has changed the longer I have been involved in advocacy. I think I would have said Martin Luther King a few years ago. He was an eloquent leader. However, over the past few years, the level of hatred and distrust for those who are not similar to us has grown so rapidly that I think that anyone who shows kindness and stands up for what is right is my hero. To the junior high student who stands up to his friends who are bullying the trans kid in class: you are my hero. To the providers and mental health professionals who are providing care to immigrants in this country: you are my hero. And to the people in the USA who are supporting grassroots movements and hitting the streets in protest of everything from supporting the #metoo movement, to protecting women's rights, to supporting diversity: you are my heroes.

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. Kohar Der Simonian, MD, is an alum of the Leadership Training Academy Class of 2010 and a member of Physicians for Reproductive Health's Board of Directors.

[Read more interviews from the Meet Our Advocates series.](#)





CONTACT

Jen Girdish

 jgirdish@prh.org

 (646) 649-9927

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LEGAL PUBLICATION

December 3, 2019

Amicus Brief, June Medical Services v. Gee

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November 22, 2019

Meet Our Advocates: Dr. Katherine Brown

What are your gender pronouns? She/her/hers Where are you from? I am from the Boston area. What's your specialty or area of expertise? I... practice [...]





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