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Guest Post: Primary care lifeline

- Sarah E. Stumbar, MD, MPH

In March, the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) [released a report](#) estimating that there would be a shortage of between 12,500 and 31,100 primary care physicians by 2025. These projections are not news to anyone in medicine, but in the uproar following Columbia University/New York-Presbyterian's [unilateral decision to close its family medicine residency program](#) (and the [subsequent quick reversal of that decision](#)), it became obvious that most people still do not understand the complex and integral roles that primary care physicians play in their patients' lives.

[During my Family Medicine residency](#), I provided prenatal care, delivered babies, provided postpartum contraception, [performed options counseling and abortions](#), and saw the infants I delivered grow into toddlers. I went on home visits to provide emotional support and end-of-life care to a magnificent woman dying of esophageal cancer. I followed my patients from the clinic to the inpatient setting and back to the clinic again. I worked to forge relationships that would hopefully keep my patients out of the hospital. I gave out my cell phone number and my e-mail address, and I welcomed phone calls and clinic walk-ins whenever there was a question or concern. I made countless calls to specialists, begging them to see my patients sooner than the next available appointment in six months. Once, for a patient with possible lung cancer on a CT scan, I made twelve phone calls to a pulmonologist before I was able to get her an appointment within an acceptable amount of time. In the Bronx community where I trained, I made certain that I was the strongest advocate for my patients, many of whom had never had anyone advocate for them before.

Now seeing uninsured patients in a mobile health clinic in Miami-Dade County, I am the safety net that wouldn't otherwise exist. My new patients are quickly learning that I believe in their right to health care, and I will do anything to help them navigate our struggling medical system. The Washington Heights Community served by Columbia's deeply invested residents—and this nation as a whole—needs more family physicians, not more medical administrators who have forgotten the daily realities of our patients.

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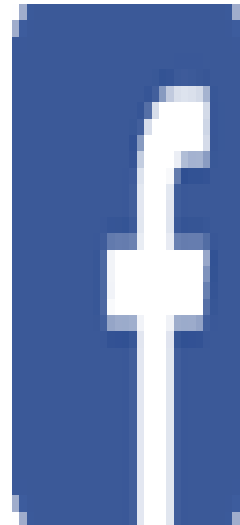
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