

A WOMAN PHYSICIAN'S JOURNEY OF

Fortitude & Firsts

Despite being Valedictorian in my Minnesota high school, the principal pulled me aside to inform me that I had set my sights too high, and that I needed to choose another career path because no young ladies at my school had ever become physicians.

Well guess what.... That inspired me to be even more determined.

A quarter of a century ago, August 1, 1997, was the day that the first female OB/GYN physician came to practice in Rapid City. That was me.

Being the first female OB/GYN in Rapid City meant being the first female OB/GYN to deliver a baby, the first female OB/GYN to do a laparoscopy and hysterectomy, the first female OB/GYN to start a private practice, the first SD physician to serve as an ACOG District Officer, and countless other firsts. These firsts create change, and change comes with obstacles and resistance. When I first came to Rapid City, women were not allowed epidurals in labor, and the L&D sounded like a torture chamber. Epidurals are now available to women in labor, but other needed changes, such as access to healthcare for women, has been met with more resistance. Access to care for women improves outcomes which will prevent maternal mortality.

The other day I had lunch with the ACOG National President, Dr. Hoskins, and she shared with me her inspiring personal story. Her story was being the first woman in her endeavors, and the unfairness and the struggles of needing to work 100X harder for the same goals that her male counterparts easily achieved. Although she was overqualified for the positions she sought, she was passed over because of her gender and skin color. I then realized that many women physicians from our era have similar stories. In fact, women from all fields of work and life have similar stories.

I always knew I'd be working many times harder than my male counterparts, while needing to maintain better outcomes in all

aspects of medicine, I always knew from the beginning that I'd need strength of mind, more fortitude. Back then, things were different in the work force when you wanted to have a baby. I took 4 weeks off postpartum which meant no more "vacation" time for over a year. During my residency, I couldn't go home for days, so my husband needed to bring my baby to me.

While in Residency, my attending physician required surgical intervention with laparoscopy. When she asked me to do her surgery, as a Resident, I was incredibly honored because despite being a Resident and a female, she chose me. One of my greatest honors is when my healthcare colleges have enough faith in me to select me for their care, deliveries, and surgery.

Fortitude brings results. I'm appreciative to have already cared for over 27,000 patients, and delivered over 8000 babies in Rapid City. Women should always have choices in healthcare. For better or worse, over the last quarter of a century, female OB/GYN physicians in Rapid City have surged from 0% to 77%.

Being the "first" in any aspect of life means taking risks, breaking barriers, and redefining the "norm". My baby that visited the hospital during my Residency to be with me became the first female high school South Dakotan to triple jump over 40 foot, and win nationals. Another daughter was the first gymnast from Rapid City to compete on any NCAA Division 1 team. Whether it's sports, work, or life, women having the fortitude to be "first" is what changes the world. I'm excited for the next chapter of firsts that these next generation women will make. We must take the future into our own hands to make positive change.

While being the first female OB/GYN to practice in Rapid City has certainly come with some challenges, I have enjoyed it. History shapes women and women shape history. Don't let anyone hold you back. When you are told "you can't," be inspired and more determined to achieve your goals.



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