

Unexpected career path takes Dr. Cosgrove in right direction for kids

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When Lisa Anne Cosgrove, M.D., FAAP, enrolled at the University of Miami nearly five decades ago, she intended to join its renowned music program and further her dream of becoming a jazz clarinetist.

Then she saw a commercial about the country's nursing shortage and the myriad ways nurses help people and save lives. The ad spoke to Dr. Cosgrove, who decided to give up her musical ambitions and study nursing instead.

On the way to catch a flight to Miami to start her freshman year, Dr. Cosgrove told her parents that she intended to change her major. Though surprised, her parents supported the move.

"They told me to be whatever I wanted to be and be the best," she said.

Road to success

The decision to study nursing put Dr. Cosgrove on a career path that included a few more twists and turns before she would find her way to pediatrics. After earning her bachelor's degree in 1975, she began working as a nurse in Miami Children's Hospital's pediatric/neonatal intensive care unit. She quickly gained a reputation for peppering doctors with questions and for her desire to understand all facets of medicine.

She came by her interest naturally. Her grandfather was a renowned ear, nose, throat and eye doctor, as the specialty was known at the time. Her father was a prominent eye doctor.

Impressed by her enthusiasm and thirst for knowledge, several Miami doctors suggested Dr. Cosgrove go to medical school. She took their advice and enrolled in the Universidad Autónoma de Guadalajara medical school, where the classes were taught in Spanish.

The move would lead to a 40-year career in pediatrics and a lifetime of advocating for children. She also would climb to some of the highest positions in the Academy, including her recent election to the AAP Board of Directors from District X.

Dr. Cosgrove continued to work as a nurse throughout medical school, eventually earning her degree from the Ross University School of Medicine in Dominica, West Indies. She did her residency in Georgia and returned to her native Arkansas to practice.

"For me, the biggest difference between being a nurse and being a doctor was the responsibility," Dr. Cosgrove said. "As a physician, you're responsible for everyone. The patients, the nurses, the nurse

practitioners ... everyone.”

After working in Arkansas for several years, Dr. Cosgrove moved to central Florida and joined Atlantic Coast Pediatrics, a private practice based on Merritt Island. She joined the state’s AAP chapter and rose through its ranks to become president in 2010.

Taking the lead on issues

While Florida Chapter president, Dr. Cosgrove dealt with two chapter-related lawsuits that extended into her time as past president. One suit concerned lack of access to health care for children on Medicaid and was settled in 2016. The other dealt with the rights of pediatricians to ask families if they had firearms at home and, if so, whether they were stored safely. A federal appeals court sided with the doctors and other plaintiffs, allowing them to talk about gun safety.

“For a lot of us in Florida, she was one of the members who you could always count on to take the lead on issues where not everybody has the same views,” said chapter President Madeline Joseph, M.D., FAAP. “She does what she always does — and that’s to do what’s best for kids. And if that means enduring criticism, she’s able to endure it.”

On the national level, Dr. Cosgrove has served on the Chapter Forum Management Committee, the Section on International Medical Graduates Executive Committee and as District X vice chair before becoming chair last year.

“I think she’s a great leader,” said District X Vice Chair Mobeen H. Rathore, M.D., FAAP. “She’s very collaborative in her work, and she’s always very willing to share knowledge and give support. She brings clarity to situations and works through issues.”

Her colleagues believe she is particularly equipped to handle the diverse needs of her district, which includes Florida, Alabama, Georgia and Puerto Rico. A bilingual pediatrician who has worked in big cities, smaller communities and foreign countries, she understands the importance of inclusion and the value of differing opinions.

District X also has endured several natural disasters in recent years, and Dr. Cosgrove has led efforts to ensure pediatricians have the resources they need.

“She’s one of those people who does a lot, and she does so much that you don’t know about all of it,” Dr. Joseph said. “It is neat to see someone who does so much behind the scenes. She is very humble.”

Dr. Cosgrove also is well-known for the colorful headpieces, or fascinators, she began wearing in 2008 with the hopes of projecting a softer look. They have become her trademark, much to her patients’ delight.

“My patients not only love them,” she said, “they give me them as Christmas presents.”

Other pursuits

In addition to her AAP involvement, Dr. Cosgrove has worked with an international medical missions group. During her last trip to Ecuador, the mission team saw up to 200 patients each day and treated illnesses that doctors don’t encounter in the U.S.

“I have been fortunate enough to take my family on many of these trips, and it’s given them the opportunity to change their perspective,” Dr. Cosgrove said. “I’ve always tried to raise my kids to be caring and empathetic, and these trips have only made them more so.”

She's also a passionate soccer fan, whose office is filled with pictures of her sons' state championship-winning teams. She served as team doctor for most of their teams and instituted an educational program called "Who We Play For" after one of her sons' teammates died from a sudden cardiac arrest during a game in 2007. The organization aims to reduce sudden cardiac death in teens and young adults by providing affordable cardiac screening and increasing awareness.

More than the team doctor, she was the boys' biggest fan — one more accolade and title in a career filled with them.

"I'm a bonafide soccer mom," she said.

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