An Advocate for Reproductive Rights

A retired OB-GYN creates a fund to help ensure training.

Paula K. Bernstein, Ph.D., M.D. ’76, may be retired from her obstetrics and gynecology practice, but she has never stopped supporting women or the medical school that launched her career.

Miller School alumna Paula K. Bernstein, M.D., has made a donation to support education and skills training in family planning and reproductive health.

After earning a Ph.D. in chemistry from the California Institute of Technology with plans to teach, Dr. Bernstein decided to pursue medicine instead. She was active in the women’s movement in the 1970s and wanted to find a way to help women using her scientific background. In 1974, she enrolled in the University of Miami School of Medicine’s Ph.D.-to-M.D. program, which allowed students to use their Ph.D. credits to graduate in two years instead of four.

“I was grateful for the opportunity to make a career change without attending a four-year medical school,” Dr. Bernstein said. “The rigorous program, renowned faculty and excellent clinical training prepared me well.”

For 30 years, she had a thriving OB-GYN practice in Los
Angeles and loved coming to work.

“There are few highs in people’s lives like the birth of their children,” Dr. Bernstein said. “I forged wonderful relationships with patients that lasted for decades.”

From Medical Practice to Medical Mysteries

Since retiring in 2010, she has reinvented herself as a fiction writer of medical mysteries with the Hannah Kline Mystery Series. She has published eight books and is working on the ninth.

But as an avid supporter of reproductive freedom, Dr. Bernstein felt she needed to act after the U.S. Supreme Court last year overturned the 1973 Roe v. Wade decision that made access to an abortion a federal right in the United States.

“Every woman should have the right to make decisions about her own body,” Dr. Bernstein said. “I am concerned about patients in states that prevent abortions and physicians who might risk losing their licenses and freedom.”

She and her husband created the Paula and Uri Bernstein Fund for Women’s Reproductive Health Care in the Division of Family Planning in the Department of Obstetrics, Gynecology and Reproductive Sciences at the Miller School, which provides medical students and residents the opportunity to enhance their education and skills in family planning and reproductive health. The fund supports the Family Planning and Abortion Training Program, which offers out-of-state rotations for medical students and residents, and brings nationally recognized speakers to Grand Rounds.
“We are grateful to Dr. Bernstein for ensuring medical students and residents are trained to care for our patients in all their reproductive needs,” said Ian J. Bishop, M.P.H. ‘11, M.D. ’13, assistant professor and director of family planning in the Department of Obstetrics, Gynecology and Reproductive Sciences.

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