

# Dr. Omaidá Velazquez Delivers 'Women in Surgery' Lecture at Yale

A strong focus on mentorship and role models can help accelerate the representation of women in academic medicine, Omaidá C. Velazquez, M.D., chair of the DeWitt Daughtry Family Department of Surgery at the Miller School of Medicine, told the more than 320 people gathered virtually for a lecture she delivered at Yale University in celebration of Women's History Month.

Dr. Velazquez, the David Kimmelman Endowed Chair in Vascular and Endovascular Surgery, was chosen to present Yale's prestigious fifth annual "Women in Surgery" lecture and related seminars, and she took the opportunity to describe the urgent need to increase the involvement of women at all levels of academic medicine. "While we have made a lot of progress, particularly in the last decade, we still have quite a way to go," she said.



Dr. Omaidia C. Velazquez

She opened her [presentation](#), titled “Breaking Boundaries and Changing the Future,” with a history of women in the workplace, moving on to the evolution of academic medicine. While the number of women in medical school classes has continued to increase, growth in the number of women residents, faculty, division and section chiefs, and department chairs has not kept up.

“Despite a growing and significant pipeline in the last 25 years, women continue to be underrepresented in leadership positions in academic surgery,” Dr. Velazquez said in her presentation. Only 6 percent of surgery chairs are women.

This must be addressed, she said, because it affects disparities in health outcomes for underrepresented groups. “When we get it right, we will move forward.”

“There’s an intercept between traditional gender roles, unconscious bias and sexism, and lack of role models,” Dr.

Velazquez said in an interview. Our “great opportunity” in academic medicine is to mentor students and show prospective students that an influential career in surgery or other specialties is “absolutely possible.”

Proactive mentorship activities that showcase the importance of women in academic medicine are a priority at the University of Miami, she said. “I think the Miller School is at the forefront of initiatives that support women in academic medicine. I was the first Hispanic American woman chair of surgery. Now we take it for granted, but it is a big deal because it just doesn’t happen. Talent in that arena doesn’t get recognized.”

Dr. Velazquez says it is important for faculty and other leaders to tell students, “Remember, it is your talent that we want to bring to our field. Capturing a wonderful array of talent, with men and women equally represented, moves fields forward.” She described important mentors in her own career, including at the Miller School.

Henri R. Ford, M.D., M.H.A., dean and chief academic officer of the Miller School and a pediatric surgeon, “believes that a path forward for women in surgery has to have mentorship and sponsorship,” she said in her lecture. “It is a critical aspect.”

She is optimistic about the future of diversity in surgery and other specialties. “It’s heartening to see that this is becoming increasingly important to both men and women.”

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