



## A lifetime of service to women and their health—the career of Barbara S. Levy, MD

OBG MANAGEMENT celebrates Dr. Levy's remarkable tenure combining private ObGyn practice with eloquent and effective public service

**Janelle Yates, Senior Editor**

When Barbara S. Levy, MD, gave up her thriving private practice in Federal Way, Washington, last year to assume the newly created position of Vice President for Health Policy at the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG), she set in motion a cascade of personal and professional changes.

On the personal front, besides the shift from clinical practice to health policy, the new post necessitated that she move from the West to the East Coast and endure temporary separation from her husband. But the opportunity to make a “real difference” in health policy made it worthwhile, she says.

On the professional front, the new position greatly broadened Dr. Levy's opportunities to pursue a goal that has marked her entire career: doing “what's best for our patients and their families.”

As Vice President for Health Policy, Dr. Levy:

- oversees ACOG's legislative policy and regulatory affairs at the federal and state levels
- supervises ACOG's Voluntary Review of Quality of Care, as well as the Safety Certification for Outpatient Practice Excellence for Women's Health (SCOPE) program
- continues the College's efforts on behalf of its Office of Global Women's Health to promote national and international programs to improve women's health worldwide.

“ACOG is doing so many exciting things in the global women's health arena,” says Dr. Levy. “I am thrilled to be actively involved

in these projects and to have the opportunity to expand ACOG's leadership role in promoting quality health care for women.”

Another change necessitated by her post at ACOG: Dr. Levy has resigned her position on the OBG MANAGEMENT Board of Editors, a seat she has held since 1996.

In gratitude for her long tenure and the many milestones she helped bring about, the journal awarded her with lifetime achievement recognition at the 2013 ACOG annual clinical meeting for her service to OBG MANAGEMENT readers, women's health, and the women of the United States.

### A seasoned clinician who keeps the “big picture” in mind

Dr. Levy is not new to health policy. In addition to her private practice in Washington state, she helped design and served as medical director of the Women's Health and Breast Center for the Franciscan Health System in Tacoma; she also served as medical director of women's and children's services for the health system. As a member of ACOG since 1984, Dr. Levy has served on several national committees and task forces. And she has worked hard as chair of the American Medical Association's RVS Update Committee (RUC) to ensure that services in the women's health arena are reimbursed as robustly as men's health-care services.

Dr. Levy has published or coauthored more than 65 studies and articles related to

CONTINUED ON PAGE 20

her main research interests, which include hysterectomy, endoscopic surgery, menopause and hormone therapy, osteoporosis, pelvic pain, surgical outcomes, female sexual function, and physician payment policy.

She is a member of the American Society for Reproductive Medicine and the American Urogynecologic Society and a past president of AAGL. She also has served as a consultant to and member of the US Food and Drug Administration's ObGyn Devices Panel.

But it is her passion to enhance women's health that drives her day to day.

"More and more of us are employed, and there are more rules than ever before," she says. "When these rules limit our ability to provide the best care possible for our patients, we need to get a voice and do something about it."

### Choosing the rebel's path

Dr. Levy graduated magna cum laude from Princeton University with a degree in psychology. She went on to earn her medical degree from the University of California, San Diego, followed by an internship and residency in obstetrics and gynecology at the University of Oregon Health Sciences Center (now the Oregon Health and Sciences University) in Portland.

Although Princeton graduates typically go on to medical school at Columbia or Yale, Dr. Levy made a very different choice.

"I've always been a rebel, so I didn't want to follow the usual pathway," she says.

At UC San Diego, Dr. Levy fell under the inspirational wing of Donna Brooks, MD, only the second female ObGyn in San Diego history.

"I was very lucky to have Donna as a mentor," Dr. Levy says. "I would not have gone into obstetrics and gynecology without her."

Two years into Dr. Levy's residency at the University of Oregon, her husband's career as a cardiac surgeon necessitated a move to the Seattle area. She finished her residency there, still under the auspices of the University of Oregon, with Leon Speroff, MD, as a mentor.

After residency, she was hired by the Mason Clinic in Seattle and began working with

Glen E. Hayden, MD, and Richard Soderstrom, MD, who mentored her in vaginal surgery.

"It was a time when people coming out of residency went into practice with senior colleagues," she explained. The senior physicians benefited from exposure to new ideas, and younger physicians gained from the senior physicians' experience.

"In the end, under this arrangement, the patients benefited."

### Claiming a voice

Among the issues that concern Dr. Levy most are the rapid changes shaping medicine—not all of them beneficial.

"We're spending too much money on health care and not getting value for what we're spending," she says. "It's not sustainable."

The move to ACOG provides her an opportunity to help frame how health care is delivered and, ultimately, to help slow the hemorrhage of health-care dollars in unenriching ways.

"I couldn't do that in a small practice," she says. "In my view, the changes have to be geared around what's best for the patient."

She also strives to be a mentor to younger physicians, particularly women, in an era when red tape and time constraints significantly limit the altruism that was once the hallmark of the medical profession. She believes mentors remain important in medicine.

"Different people can help you at different times in your career," she says, reflecting on her own experience and the doctors who shaped it.

"Senior physicians should take responsibility for guiding younger physicians when they come out of training," she says. "They should graciously volunteer."

Despite her many responsibilities, Dr. Levy finds time to connect with junior physicians. And despite her many accomplishments, she maintains a refreshing sense of modesty.

"I'm just an ordinary doc," she says. "The only difference between me and everybody else out there is an intolerance when things aren't right."

"I speak out loudly." 🗣️