

# Humans of CDI

## Yasmin G. Hernandez-Barco, MD

Director of the MGH Pancreas Program  
Director of the NPF designated National Center of Excellence for Pancreatitis  
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**Dr. Hernandez-Barco** Dr. Yasmin Hernandez-Barco, MD is board-certified gastroenterologist who specializes in diseases of the pancreas. She serves as the Medical Pancreatologist for the Division of Gastroenterology at Massachusetts General Hospital with a clinical focus on caring for patients with acute pancreatitis, chronic pancreatitis, pancreatitis of unknown etiology, exocrine pancreatic insufficiency, pancreatic cysts, and pancreatic cancer.

Dr. Hernandez-Barco is a physician-scientist and studies the immunobiology of pancreatic cancer precursor lesions and the role of the immune system in malignant progression of pancreatic cancer. She is actively involved in research which includes developing technologies for the early detection of pancreatic cancer and pancreatic cysts and developing clinical diagnostic tools in the management of various subtypes of pancreatitis.

Prior to starting clinical practice in 2012, Dr. Hernandez-Barco received her medical degree from SUNY Stony Brook School of Medicine where she was inducted into the Alpha Omega Alpha and Gold Humanism Honors Societies and awarded the Glasgow-Rubin Citation for academic achievement. She completed her residency and chief residency at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai. Dr. Hernandez-Barco completed her Gastroenterology and Hepatology Fellowship in the Division of Gastroenterology at MGH. She completed an additional year of advanced fellowship training in Medical Pancreatology at MGH and Brigham and Women's Hospital.

She is an active member of the multidisciplinary Pancreatic Cyst Clinic at MGH. As a testament to her commitment to patients with pancreatic disorders, she was appointed as the director for the MGH Pancreas Program and has recently launched a Multidisciplinary Complicated Pancreatitis center for patients with chronic and necrotizing pancreatitis.

In addition to these local efforts, she is actively involved in gastroenterology and pancreatic professional societies, and serves on several national committees including the American College of Gastroenterology's (ACG) Food and Drug Administration Related Matters Committee, ACG Technology and Innovation Committee, AGA Pancreatic Council and ACG Young Physician Scholar Program Steering Committee. Lastly, she is a participant of the Consortium for the study of Pancreatitis, Diabetes and Pancreatic Cancer which is a national consortium to advance the study of pancreatic diseases.

***To learn more about Yasmin, the impact CDI had on her career, and much more, keep reading.***

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### **What impact has receiving the PSDA/CTDA award had on your career and science?**

The PSDA/CTDA award came at a critical time in my career when I was transitioning from fellowship to junior faculty. Without this funding, I would not have had the ability to generate important data for my career development award

and make discoveries that I believe will impact patients. From this work, we are now validating a new clinical biomarker that will hopefully inform which patients will benefit from surgery for their tumors.

### **How has CDI impacted your career?**

The CDI has been one of the MGH organizations that has been most supportive of my career, specifically through funding. I am a pancreas-focused physician and since joining faculty I have had the opportunity to grow the pancreas center and develop many novel research and clinical programs. I can say, with confidence, that without the support of the CDI and the PSDA I would not have been able to devote myself fully to these efforts. I have also made so many close friends and met so many inspiring colleagues through the CDI. I also had the honor of serving on the resident-fellow committee as educational chair during my fellowship and truly enjoyed this leadership opportunity within the CDI and made wonderful friendships.

### **From your perspective, why are awards like the PSDA/CTDA and engagement with organizations/centers such as CDI crucial for advancement within your field and the broader scientific community?**

A center that is dedicated to supporting and promoting a culture of diversity and inclusion and supporting scientific endeavors of this community are critical for advancement in medicine. My first mentor as a premed student was a Cuban female gastroenterologist. Working with her, helped me break down some of the barriers in my own mind about what could be possible to achieve in academic medicine. Since that time, I have been blessed to have the opportunity to mentor many trainees, including those who are URIM. It is my hope that I am also passing down what I learned and inspire the future generation to accomplish things that will help improve patient care. Organizations like the CDI, which provide funding to scientific advancement, are paramount to ensuring we continue to move the needle in the way we approach patient care and research.

### **What don't people know about you? What would people be surprised to learn about you?**

I am a second degree brown belt in Shaolin Kempo. For those that know me well, it may surprise them to know that I was in some form of competitive sport/dance through medical school. I love the intensity of training towards some type of athletic event or competition.

### **What is you/your team's proudest accomplishment?**

My proudest recent accomplishment is the creation of the MGB Complicated Pancreatitis treatment program. There has always been an incredible pancreas team here at MGH and since joining, I have had the honor to work with all of them. In caring for patients with pancreatic disorders, it became evidence that so many would benefit from in person multidisciplinary care. With the support of my division and other divisions throughout the hospital, we have been able to make that a reality just this month.

### **Tell us about your heritage. How does your heritage influence your work?**

I am of Cuban heritage. My parents immigrated here from Cuba at the age of 10 and 17 during the political crisis with only the clothing on their back. My mom arrived in Texas, received a boxed lunch from a church and was taken by bus to Los Angeles where she and her sisters and mom lived in a motel room for several months while finding jobs in factories and going to school. My father arrived in Ohio and his parents, siblings and aunt drove to Los Angeles for work. He worked several jobs starting at age 10 through all of his schooling as well. Their parents said to them "work and study." It is a phrase that I also heard growing up. Both of my parents were fortunate to go on to receive graduate degrees and raised my sister and I often hearing that same mantra: "work and study." I never recall my parents ever complaining. Growing up we were always raised with a strong work ethic and above all a great sense of gratitude for the opportunities they and we were given when they came to the United States. I know I am privileged to have parents who went through those sacrifices to give us a better life and recognize that there are many other individuals who continue to struggle every day. A part of me always strives to recognize that the challenges of others (patients or colleagues) are not always apparent and that everyone is always going through something so I try to be

compassionate in patient care and at work. I try to approach my work with a great sense of gratitude and find joy in what I do because I know what a privilege it is to practice medicine. I have to say that I find immense joy in the work that I do here at MGH.

**What do you do for fun?**

I love traveling, skiing, ice skating, cooking, exercising and spending time with my daughter.