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SCHOOL OF NURSING
4610 X Street, Suite 4202
Sacramento, CA 95817

UNLEASHING THE
POWER AND PASSION
OF NURSING

From
Peru to
UC Davis:
A graduate
student's
heart for the
underserved



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GROWING UP IN LIMA, Peru, Yael Saavedra recognized her passion to care for the underserved and her drive to achieve a rewarding profession within the health care community. It was not until she pursued a master's degree in physician assistant studies at the Betty Irene Moore School of Nursing at UC Davis that her perspective on both her home country and her role in health care would change profoundly.

While working toward her medical-doctor degree in Peru, Saavedra worked in pediatrics and obstetrics at the San Bartolome Maternal Hospital and volunteered in hospitals and clinics across Peru. From HIV units in low-income cities to nursing homes in rural areas, she experienced people and situations that changed her life, including caring for her ill grandmother, which ignited her interest in geriatrics. Facing a stagnant job market upon graduation, Saavedra relocated to the United States and entered the School of Nursing to pursue a Master of Health Services — Physician Assistant Studies Degree.

"Sometimes you come into a career, like health care, with the idea of just making money," Saavedra explained. "The more UC Davis and my professors expose me to underserved communities, the more I feel like I want to be the person who gives back with my heart by providing medical support to these people and their families within a primary-care setting."

"I provided care to people who didn't even have enough money to buy food for the day. If they required an x-ray that only cost \$10, they could not afford it."

—Physician assistant student
Yael Saavedra



When it came time to fulfill the required minimum of four weeks in a clinical rotation working with underserved communities, Saavedra jumped at the opportunity to work in her home country, an experience that ushered in a new outlook.

"It was a very humbling experience. Here in America we have the best care and tools in the world at your fingertips," Saavedra said. "While working with the underserved in Peru I provided care to people who didn't even have enough money to buy food for the day. If they required an x-ray that only cost \$10, they could not afford it. I am so grateful the school encourages this experience. We live in

Yael Saavedra, a physician assistant graduate student, gained confidence and a new perspective to serve in rural, primary-care settings.

a bubble here. We must explore and open our eyes to appreciate what we have and what we can offer based on our many resources."

Assistant Clinical Professor John Siiteri serves as Saavedra's graduate adviser and thesis chair. He describes Saavedra as engaged, articulate and enthusiastic during small-group activities. She also brings a different dynamic to her fellow classmates in the nation's only dual physician assistant and nurse practitioner programs.

"Yael has a quick wit, is able to appreciate the complexities of health-care delivery and understands the importance of a holistic approach to

health care," Siiteri said. "In class, she is energetic and light-hearted, often providing a necessary release from the tensions that are inherent in physician assistant and nurse practitioner studies."

The UC Davis School of Medicine Community and Family Medicine Department first offered a physician assistant graduate certificate program in 1982 through a unique partnership with Stanford University. In 2013, the program was reconfigured into the 27-month master's-degree program provided through the nursing school.

More than 67 percent of UC Davis physician assistant and nurse practitioner graduates work in underserved areas. Additionally, nearly 70 percent of graduates work in primary care, compared to significantly lower national averages of between 30 and 40 percent. Studies show that students practice in areas where they completed clinical rotations. Providing high-quality primary care to the underserved is a core value of UC Davis and the School of Nursing and fueled Saavedra's desire to work within this community.

"Through my time at UC Davis, I've gained confidence, increased my English-language clinical terminology and opened my mind and eyes to how I can make a difference with the underserved," Saavedra added. "Life is about giving back. My mission in health care is to give something back."

PLEASE FEEL FREE to share this or contact us with any comments or questions. We welcome your feedback. For more information, visit nursing.ucdavis.edu or contact the School of Nursing at 916-734-2145 or at BettyIreneMooreSON@ucdmc.ucdavis.edu.