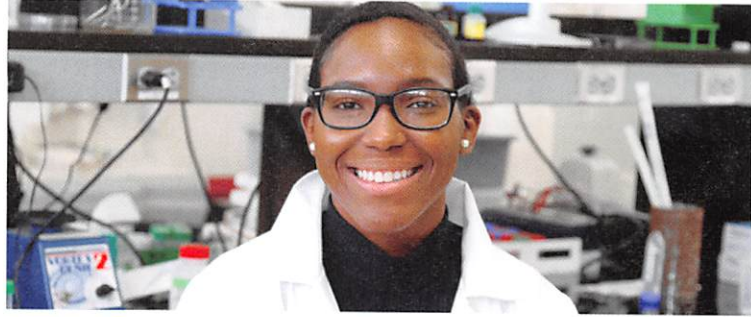




Chemistry
Magyar



Carla
Moreira '03



Sarah
Ebirim '22

Each year RIC faculty are able to nominate several students as candidates for the Early Identification Program. Students who are accepted into this competitive program and who successfully complete their undergraduate coursework can be accepted into Brown's medical school upon graduation.

Dr. Carla Moreira '03 went through the Early Identification Program, as well. After earning her M.D. at Brown's medical school in 2008, she fulfilled her residency in general surgery at the University of Chicago in 2013, followed by a two-year fellowship training in vascular and endovascular surgery at the Boston Medical Center.

In 2015 Moreira joined the Department of Surgery at Brown University's medical school, with attending privileges at Rhode Island Hospital, The Miriam Hospital, Women & Infants Hospital, Fatima Hospital and Roger Williams Hospital. She was also appointed chief of vascular and endovascular surgery at the Providence VA Medical Center in 2018. In addition to her busy clinical practice, Moreira established SURGE Lab in 2019 to research health disparities among marginalized groups.

THE MENTORS Moreira is deeply committed to mentorship. In fact, she credits her own success

“I was motivated to go into medicine as a child in Cape Verde. My mom worked in a clinic and would take me with her on occasion. I thought it was such an amazing way to connect to people.”

—DR. CARLA MOREIRA

“When the students I advised come back to tell me they've been accepted into medical or dental school, I feel like a proud parent.”

—PROFESSOR ELAINE MAGYAR

to having had great mentors, which is why, when she received an email from premed student Sarah Ebirim '22 asking for permission to shadow her in her OR and clinic, Moreira immediately said, "Yes."

"It's been such a blessing," Ebirim says. "I got to sit in on her surgeries and I got hands-on experience in her clinic by being able to meet different patients. It was amazing to watch her at work." (Read sidebar for more about Ebirim's mentorship with Dr. Moreira.)

Because Ebirim's interest is in neonatal surgery, which is surgery on the pregnant mother and her baby in utero, Moreira set it up so that Ebirim could also spend a week in the OR of Dr. Francois Luks, pediatric surgeon-in-chief at Rhode Island Hospital.

It was a real eye-opening experience, Ebirim says, particularly the case of spina bifida. Spina bifida occurs when a baby's spinal cord fails to develop or close properly while in the womb. Surgery is done to close the defect.

"Rhode Island Hospital only gets about one case like that a year, yet I was somehow given this amazing opportunity to witness it," she says. "The surgery itself was extremely intense. There were two anesthesiologists, one fetal surgeon, two pediatric fellows, two neurosurgeons and Dr. Luks himself."

"First, they cut open the mother and then the neurosurgeons came in and operated on the child's spinal cord.

It was such an invasive procedure. Everything had to be timed perfectly. Dr. Luks said once we open the mother, we had 45 minutes to complete the surgery. The entire surgery took under an hour," she says.

What excites Ebirim about medicine is that it is always changing. "We're always learning something new and yet there are other things that happen miraculously that we'll never be able to understand," she says. "I'm fascinated with how life is created and how, on the nano scale, everything works to make up the human being."

Imminent neonatal surgeon Ebirim takes her place among the next crop of future doctors educated at RIC, including Morgan Andrews '22, future physician scientist; and Yenelsy Cepeda '22, prospective physician anesthesiologist.

Reflecting on the past 30-plus years, Magyar concludes that all of the students who passed through RIC's pipeline are success stories.

"Some students came in at the top of their high school class and just flew through their RIC program," she says. "We've also had a number of students who came in and really needed the nurturing that Rhode Island College provides. I think it's most rewarding to see the latter become doctors because they've succeeded way beyond their expectations – maybe not beyond their dreams but certainly beyond their expectations and other people's expectations for them. Yes, for me, they're all success stories." ↓

SARAH EBIRIM, FUTURE M.D., AND ALUMNA DR. MOREIRA, HER MENTOR

BY GITA BROWN

In the operating room there is a glass divide. On one side of the glass is a computer where hospital staff examine patients' charts, ultrasounds and CAT scans. On the other side is where surgeries take place.

There, a resident is leading an amputation on a patient's leg. Sarah Ebirim '22 stands behind him, observing what's being done from an overhead TV screen. Dr. Carla Moreira '03 hurries in to check on the resident's work. She glances over at Ebirim. "You can stand closer, Sarah," she says. Ebirim moves up until she's standing across the table from him. As he cuts through the bone with a saw, her goggles protect her eyes from the splattering blood.

"I absolutely love medicine," Ebirim says.

For a full semester, she has shadowed Dr. Moreira, a RIC alum and vascular surgeon, at Rhode Island Hospital. On Mondays she observed her surgeries and on Fridays she followed her at her clinic. Ebirim logged over 100 hours shadowing Moreira in preparation for medical school.

Ebirim's aspiration is to become a surgeon like Moreira only she'd like to specialize in neonatal surgery. She graduated from Rhode Island College this May at the top of her class, with a 3.9 GPA, a major in chemistry and a concentration in biochemistry. Born in America but of Nigerian descent, Ebirim speaks both English and Igbo and is working toward becoming more fluent in Spanish.

With admiration, she notes that Dr. Moreira speaks four languages. "It's so welcoming for patients to have a doctor who can speak in their native tongue. You can see the connections she's able to make with her



patients when the barrier of language is removed."

Fluent in Cape Verdean Creole and Portuguese, with a working knowledge of Spanish, Moreira immigrated to the United States from Cape Verde at the age of 10. She graduated with honors from Rhode Island College in 2003 with a B.A. in chemistry and a concentration in biochemistry.

In 2008 she received her M.D. from the Warren Alpert Medical School of Brown University, ranked among the top 20 medical schools in the nation. Today she works as a surgeon, researcher and teacher in the Department of Surgery at Brown's medical school.

"I really enjoy teaching and interacting with students," Moreira says. "But it's rare that I'm in the classroom teaching. Most of the real teaching is done at the bedside or in the OR."

According to Ebirim, Moreira likes to challenge her students and works hard to give her students opportunities to grow. "Dr. Moreira is someone I really look up to. I can only hope to be like her someday," she says. For Moreira, mentorship is a way to give back.

"Mentorship is critically important to me," she says. "Mentorship helped me with every advancement I made in my education, from Rhode Island public schools to Rhode Island College to Brown University. When people see other people who look like them or who

came from a similar background doing what they thought was impossible to do, it motivates them."

Moreira is also the Department of Surgery's diversity officer, leading efforts to recruit and retain underrepresented minority students and faculty in academic medicine.

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"As diversity officer, I'm not only involved in the hiring but in creating a culture that says we value diversity," she says. "I look at all levels of the Department of Surgery, from residents to faculty and staff, and try to

always be that voice that says, 'How can we do better in creating an environment that is inclusive, an environment that people from different socioeconomic, racial and educational backgrounds can add to the diversity and culture of this institution?'"

"I like to go to inner city schools to talk to children and demystify the idea of who can be a doctor," she says. "I know there are hundreds of young people in Rhode Island public schools who belong at Brown University or other top Ivy League institutions in this country. Given the opportunity, they would excel. They would even go beyond what I'm doing now. That motivates me to never let an opportunity pass where I don't encourage or say, 'This is how I did it and this is how you can do it.'"

"Dr. Moreira told me that the group of incoming residents this year for Brown's medical school is the most diverse it's ever been," Ebirim says. "I know when I start my residency, it's going to look even more colorful by the time I get there."

But first Ebirim will take a gap year to gain more pre-medical shadowing experience. Through the Atlantis Program, she will spend three weeks in Spain shadowing doctors while brushing up on her Spanish. Then she'll visit Nigeria. Ebirim has applied to more than 20 medical schools.

"She'll make a fantastic doctor," Moreira says. ■