

Dr. Linda Yancey is an infectious disease specialist and the chief of staff at Memorial Hermann Katy Hospital



SENSATIONAL
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Women*

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- Dr. Linda Yancey

Women Physician Stats

Among 3,000 infectious disease specialists, only a handful are women

35,000 U.S. women became doctors in 1975, growing to 321,000 in 2012

30% of all physicians in Texas are women

30% of internal medicine doctors are women

20% of executive medical positions are women

Breaking the Mold

Dr. Linda Yancey excels in the male-dominated medical world of infectious diseases

Written by Gail G. Collins | Select photography by Reinaldo Medina

When a Texas A&M undergrad in biology signed up for a professor's microbiology class, her life's work came into focus. Today, Dr. Linda Yancey is a rarity, where only a handful of the women studying internal medicine go on to become an infectious disease specialist (IDS). She also holds a position as chief of staff, where the demographics of executive positions have been slow to shift to women.

Dr. Yancey graduated from medical school at Texas Tech in 1996 and did her residency at Arizona's Mayo Clinic. She returned to Texas for a fellowship at Baylor after the birth of her first child. The new doctor moved down the street from her in-laws and had three more children, calling Katy home.

Dr. Mom

"The work-life balance is most challenging, and more so for female physicians," says Dr. Yancey. "Doctors don't have the option of closing the clinic because their own child is sick." Her husband, Lanier Ripple, is a software developer and works from home. It has been a major win for their family as childcare issues often fall to the mother, and Dr. Yancey praises his career support.

What children see in their home life is normal, and often it is enlightening and funny. When Dr. Yancey's oldest daughters were 5 and 7 years of age, they were together in the car traveling from a baby shower, rife with female physicians. The older daughter wondered aloud if men could be doctors. Before Dr. Yancey could speak, the sister answered in a tone that implied it was the stupidest question she had ever heard, saying, "No, only girls are allowed to be doctors." Dr. Yancey burst out laughing before she could confirm that, despite the recent evidence, both men and women can be doctors.

Female Physicians in Diagnostics

The medical field has seen a six-fold growth of female physicians over the past four decades, now representing a third of all physicians. In general, women tend toward pediatrics and gynecology, while men often fill the bulk of surgical positions. Earlier in her career, chairing the Department of Medicine, Dr. Yancey didn't receive the same gravitas as men, but she finds this less so now.

Ten years of schooling, practice, and specialized training hone the expertise of an IDS, but fewer doctors are choosing the field due to a rise in hospitals and lower salaries. In 2016, only 65% of the internships were accepted to the time-intensive "thinking specialty." Still, diagnostics are vital with the possibility of a global crisis, like Ebola, antibiotic resistance, or other problems. For instance, Dr. Yancey steers patients with a particular bloodstream infection to be tested for colon cancer, catching the signs early, and saving lives. Cases of flesh-eating bacteria found in the brackish water of our coast also require immediate action. The skills to puzzle out difficult diagnoses like these resemble TV's Dr. House. "With IDS, every case is a mystery I solve," says Dr. Yancey. "Many specialties simply treat disease, but I can cure them."

Dr. Yancey thrives on the intellectual challenge that comes from helping patients and their families. She meets people on the worst day of their lives, afraid and sick, and she offers information to aid them in understanding and gaining control of their health again.

In the last year, Dr. Yancey helped shepherd antibiotic stewardship at Memorial Hermann Katy. To the Katy community, she says, "This facility and medical staff are here to help make your lives better." KM



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Dr. Adu-Lartey was awarded a National Medical Fellow in Academic Medicine award from Johns Hopkins University



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