

Confidences de Salon



European Respiratory Society Vice President Mina Gaga leads a pulmonary medicine department at the Athens Chest Hospital. Her work focusses on clinical aspects of asthma immunology and oncology as well as clinical research and medical education. She has worked as a research fellow at the Royal Brompton and Imperial College, London, and has been involved in the European Respiratory Society in many positions, including Secretary General and Director of Learning Resources.

Did you always dream of being involved in medical research/healthcare? What brought you to medical research/healthcare?

My father was a pulmonologist and pioneer; he was a clinician but also one of the first interventional pulmonologists. He loved his work and his patients and often talked with fascination and conviction about the importance of human life, respect for the patients and the need to deliver best care. These are principles I grew up with and strongly support. So medicine was a field I knew since birth and considered both important and interesting. In pulmonary medicine in particular, a doctor can work in clinical care, acute and chronic, interact with the patients, perform interventions such as bronchoscopies, pleuroscopies or ventilatory support; however, there is also a very strong research field in many areas, including asthma, lung cancer, diffuse lung disease and many other areas.

What is the best advice you had when you were starting your professional career?

Make sure you like what you choose and work hard!

What advice would you give someone at the beginning of their professional career?

It is important to be interested in the field of work and to work with people you like/admire. Work hard and enjoy the everyday tasks as well as the

good outcomes. There will be bad days but the end result is worth it.

What has been the greatest change to make a difference in your field in your lifetime?

I don't think there has only been one change. There have been very important advances in imaging and in basic science techniques, exponentially advancing our understanding of pathogenesis and leading to more accurate and early diagnoses and new medications. Additionally, our relationship with our patients has been strong and should be kept strong. The input of the patients is even more important now, because we know, beyond a doubt, that it is a good relationship between patients and doctors and mutual understanding of the patient needs as well as the important musts in medicine that can lead to good disease management.

What do you foresee being the next great thing and what do you foresee as being the biggest challenge in your field in the next 10 years?

Being able to provide good quality care for all patients, at a cost that can be sustained long term. I think this is already the biggest challenge and will continue to be the biggest challenge in the future. It is a challenge that healthcare professionals, patients, policy makers and the industry should tackle together, talking to each other and making a strong and continuous commitment.

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ERS Vice President, Mina Gaga, tells us about herself and what she admires in others

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What is your favourite scientific breakthrough from any field?

I can't begin to think. There have been so many! Vaccines, medications, biologicals, diagnostic tools and thousands of breakthroughs in other fields, many of which impact on the medical field.

How do you see the future of the ERS? Over the next 5 years and longer?

The ERS is getting bigger and I believe it will be the leader and drive changes in pulmonary care and research. I think we have very strong groups, committees and assemblies. Both the Science and Education councils are delivering an excellent programme for the International Congress but also many grants and courses while the Advocacy Committee and the ELF are getting stronger and gain visibility. The patients now have a strong voice and network within ERS, and this is a further strength. Lastly, the Society supports networking and is supported by excellent staff and I believe that this organisation will continue to make the Society stronger.

Whom would you most like to thank?

A lot of people! My family, my parents and my husband, for inspiring me and putting up with my long hours, my professors in Athens and the UK and my colleagues in the Department who all work with dedication and passion. I also learned a lot from my interaction with ERS, in the School, the Steering Committee and the office.

What do you consider your greatest achievement?

My two sons! And my department, I am proud of my colleagues and the patient care provided.

Who are your favourite authors?

I like reading and have many favourite authors, from Jane Austen and Oscar Wilde to Robertson Davies and Malcom Gladwell. I find crime fiction and historical novels relaxing and PD James is my favourite crime author.

Where would you most like to live?

I am a city child. I have lived in Athens and in London and have been very happy in both cities. I also like very much any city with water, be it the sea or a big river and I think I would happily live in a city like Barcelona or Sydney.

What is or was your greatest journey?

Is this question about trips or life? I have fond memories of many places, from small meetings in Palermo or Edinburgh to long journeys across continents with friends, family or colleagues. And I find the everyday evolution in life fascinating: how our understanding of the world around us changes with new information and new attitudes. I remember listening to a cystic fibrosis patient in Dublin and completely changing my approach to the disease or listening to Barry Kay and Steve Holgate and discovering new ways to think about disease pathways.

What qualities do you appreciate most in your friends?

Honesty and the ability to evolve and change with time. Humour is an added benefit!

What qualities do you appreciate most in your colleagues?

Again honesty, work ethic, kindness to patients and colleagues and trying to be optimistic and create/keep an ambience of optimism and good spirit.

What do you consider to be your strengths and weaknesses?

I am fair and strongly dedicated to my work and to carrying out what needs to be done. I want my colleagues and friends to be happy and I am there for them. I like planning ahead and try to see the whole picture, not just the detail. These I consider strengths. On the other hand, I am often too quick in my responses, something which can create friction.