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2024

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# EMPOWERING *Latinas*

STORIES OF STRENGTH, CULTURE,  
AND SUCCESS P.28

**LEADING IN LIFE SCIENCES**  
MEET THE NEW GENERATION P.6

**FOSTERING CREATIVE**  
AND DIVERSE SYNERGY P.18



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*A collection of inspirational content to uplift, encourage, and empower*

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Cover Photography by OLIVER COLLIER



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Women of Color in Pharma (WOCIP) is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization with a mission to empower women of color in pharma and the life sciences to excel in their personal and professional development and to transform their pathway and the pathway of others.

wocip.org • @wocip

A Letter from the WOCIP President and Founder

# LATINAS LEAD WITH IMPACT

Amplifying the inspiring journeys of Latinas leading the charge in biopharma

**T**HE *WE ARE PHARMA* MAGAZINE ENABLES OUR STORIES TO REACH A WIDE AUDIENCE WITHIN THE INDUSTRY AND BEYOND. In

this second edition, we have an opportunity to showcase the remarkable journeys, expertise, and achievements of women who are advancing health equity in the biopharma industry and leading in their families and communities.

WOCIP is committed to amplifying the voices of Latinas and Afro-Latinas in leadership positions, making them visible role models for future generations and aspiring scientists. Their active engagement contributes to building a powerful legacy of Latinas and Afro-Latinas in biopharma, inspiring others and paving the way for greater diversity and inclusion in the field.

I am grateful to the women spotlighted in this edition who are shaping the future of biopharma by infusing diversity of thought and sharing their perspectives and their expertise. Their stories of resilience and success are powerful sources of inspiration and empowerment for other Latinas and Afro-Latinas in the industry and those considering careers in life sciences.

In closing, we applaud you for the significant impact that you have had on our industry, *tu familia* and future generations to come. WOCIP celebrates each of you and humbly amplifies your voices!

All my best,

**Charlotte Jones-Burton, MD, MS**  
president@wocip.org



# On the Rise

Get to know these early career trailblazers as they navigate the life sciences industry. Their stories of early career achievements and bold aspirations offer a glimpse into the bright future of the industry.

WORDS BY ERIN C. PERKINS

## Mentored to make a difference

**Kimberly Calix is determined to make an impact on patient outcomes and health equity in vulnerable communities. With a keen focus on anesthesiology, she is currently pursuing a residency program while maintaining her connection to the biopharma industry through organizations like WOCIP.**

Her passion for the field was ignited by mentorship from Dr. Charlotte Jones-Burton. As Kimberly explains, “One key lesson I’ve learned is the importance of evidence-based research in guiding clinical decisions.” This foundational knowledge, paired with her firsthand experience in diverse healthcare settings, shapes her approach to patient care.

Having grown up in a low-income community and trained in an under-resourced area like Newark, Kimberly understands the healthcare disparities faced by marginalized populations. “Coming from a low socioeconomic background and training in a diverse, under-resourced area like Newark has given me a deep understanding of the healthcare disparities that exist,” she shares. This perspective fuels her ambition to develop treatments and care plans that address the unique needs of these communities.



Beyond her clinical practice, Kimberly envisions a leadership role in pharmaceutical research. “I see myself becoming an attending anesthesiologist while continuing to deepen my involvement in the pharmaceutical industry,” she says. With a focus on advancing diverse clinical trials and exploring the potential of molecular biology, Kimberly is poised to contribute groundbreaking innovations to the field. Her journey is a testament to the power of mentorship, community support, and an unwavering commitment to improving healthcare outcomes.

“I developed a strong passion for improving patient care.”



## From humble roots to biopharma heights

**Ana Macarenco’s inspiring journey from a modest upbringing in Latin America to a rising star in the biopharmaceutical industry showcases the transformative power of ambition, dedication, and opportunity. As a member of WOCIP, her story serves as a beacon of hope for aspiring female professionals in the life sciences, particularly those from underrepresented backgrounds.**

Ana’s early experiences advocating for her mother’s healthcare needs ignited a passion for patient well-being and a deep understanding of the challenges faced by underserved communities. “When I consider the impact of my work, I often think of individuals like my mother—those with limited education, multiple jobs, high-stress levels, and health challenges,” she reflects. This patient-centric perspective has been a driving force throughout her career, shaping her commitment to ensuring the safety of therapies.

Ana’s dedication and proactive approach have propelled her to success. She credits the invaluable guidance and support of her mentors,

Dr. Jamie Wilkins and Jacqueline Gerena, both directors in biopharma, for emphasizing the importance of strong role models in empowering women in the industry.

Looking ahead, Ana envisions a future where she can leverage her expertise and leadership skills to make a lasting impact on global health initiatives, particularly those benefiting underserved communities. Her story is a beacon of hope, demonstrating that with passion, resilience, and a commitment to lifelong learning, the next generation of Latina leaders can break barriers and achieve extraordinary success in the life sciences.



## Building a career with impact

Although Sam Sarblah is just getting started in her career, her deep-seated passion for helping patients hints at the promising leadership she'll have in the industry. Her background in healthcare management and business administration, coupled with the industry knowledge and valuable connections gained through her participation in WOCIP's Global Leadership Accelerator Development Program, provides her with a unique perspective.

"I developed a strong passion for improving patient care, ensuring their voices are heard and needs are met, as I too am a patient and understand the importance of feeling acknowledged and cared for."

Her initial perception of the industry as a complex, technical realm has evolved into a broader appreciation for its collaborative nature. "I've come to appreciate how essential it is to ensure that the entire lifecycle of drug development—from research and clinical trials to commercialization and post-market surveillance—is conducted with a focus on patient advocacy," she explains.

With only a brief tenure under her belt, Sam has already made significant strides. "While I haven't yet had the opportunity to lead a significant project in my early career, I have been actively involved in supporting various initiatives and learning from experienced colleagues," she says.

Like any budding professional, Sarblah has faced her share of hurdles. "Understanding the complex landscape and how all the different business units work cross-functionally to produce results that improve patients' lives" was initially daunting. However, she tackled this by seeking mentorship, collaborating across teams, and immersing herself in the industry.

Her enthusiasm for the field is contagious. "The opportunity to learn and grow is a significant motivator for me," she says. "Knowing that my contributions, no matter how small, are part of a larger mission to improve healthcare outcomes is incredibly fulfilling."

As she looks ahead, Sam envisions a future marked by continued growth and impact. "My primary aspiration is to make meaningful contributions to impactful projects that advance medical research and patient care," she shares. ●



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# The Trailblazer: TJ Harvey's Quest for Growth, Boldness and Authenticity in Leadership

At what point in our lives do we stop learning? For **Tivonnia (TJ) Harvey, US Therapeutic Area Head for Diabetes at Novo Nordisk**, there's only one correct answer – never. In fact, after two decades of driving change in the pharmaceutical industry, she feels like she's finally arrived at the perfect place and company in her career to embrace growth, step outside her comfort zone and inspire others to do the same.

Guided by a deep commitment to patients and bringing out the best in herself and others, TJ's approach to both life and work has been shaped by an unconventional and diverse career path, spanning compliance, commercial, training and development, marketing, and sales.

Now, as a beloved leader at Novo Nordisk, TJ oversees a team of individuals dedicated to bringing medicine into the hands of those who need it most. Reflecting on her journey thus far, and the responsibility and impact of leading in such a dynamic industry as a woman of color, TJ explores some of the most meaningful lessons she's learned and aims to spread across her own community along the way.

## **You don't need permission to be your authentic self**

Always unapologetically herself, TJ is proud in her own skin and embraces the roles she's chosen in her life, especially that of a mother to two children. Yet she recognizes the time and effort it can take to arrive at this stage and encourages anyone struggling to be their full, authentic self to trust in their value and not wait for others to pave the way. "The older you get, the more comfortable you can be in your own skin. Some of that comes with maturity, but it can also come from just taking a risk and

putting yourself out there," said TJ. "For me, that desire to be more of myself came with the realization that not only do I have something to say, but I have a responsibility to help others speak up. I often tell my peers, and especially women of color, you've earned a place in this industry for a reason. Don't sit in the back of any room; allow your voice to be heard. It's your right and channeling diverse perspectives is the only way to truly drive innovation."

Upon joining Novo Nordisk in 2022, TJ appreciated the space the company's culture gave to employees to not simply be a "culture fit" but a "culture add." The company's core values, known as the Novo Nordisk Way, and their focus on respect, inclusion, and belonging, deeply resonated with TJ and gave her confidence to show up as her true self while encouraging her teams to do the same.

## **It's time to think bigger than mentors and start cultivating our own personal "Board of Directors"**

While mentorship can be a valuable asset in navigating your personal and professional life, the complexities of both are often too much for any one person to serve as a guide. TJ's recommendation? Build yourself a personal Board of Directors (BoD)!

"I always seek to surround myself with people who look at things differently than I do. I want and need those diverse opinions," TJ shared. "One mentor is great, but to have a whole network (or BoD as I like to call them) of allies and advocates for different facets of your life, who can help you gain expertise in a new subject matter, challenge you to think and learn in new ways, and simply champion you as the amazing person you are, is incredibly motivating and fulfilling."



“*Having the right allies can make all the difference.*”

“Having the right allies can make all the difference,” said TJ. “They are the voices in the room when you’re not there. They are advocating for you whether you know it or not because they believe in you. That is powerful and worth finding and holding on to.”

At Novo Nordisk, one of the most meaningful examples of allyship comes in the form of Employee Resource Groups (ERGs).

“We are privileged to have the unique expertise of nine ERGs at our organization to drive business strategy, further our diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging (DEI&B) ambition, and promote intersectionality across the communities they represent so that our employees feel supported in every aspect of their social identity,” said TJ. “A Black female employee who is also a caregiver for a loved one with a chronic disease may cultivate her own personal ‘BoD’ across our Women in Novo Nordisk (WiNN), Black Employees at Novo Nordisk (BE Novo), and Living It! (employees living with or impacted by chronic health conditions) ERGs, while also serving as an ally for another community. Bringing together allies is critical to fostering belonging.”

## **A true leader will lead no matter where you put them**

With Novo Nordisk currently in one of the most exciting chapters in its 100-year history, growth, change, and strong leadership are top-of-mind for TJ. The company is seeking to bring its science and innovation to new therapy areas with great unmet needs, which has



spotlighted the need for strong, agile leaders who embrace a growth mindset. “Taking on roles in new parts of a business or industry has taught me that the best leaders can lead wherever you put them, and someone who operates with an enterprise mindset can help create a sense of unity and belonging across the organization,” said TJ.

She continued, “Our teams benefit tremendously when led by people who understand more than one aspect of the business and represent the diversity of many backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives. I believe that there is a place for everyone and that representation matters a lot. We are best equipped to deliver for the patients and communities we serve when we value every individual for what they bring to the table.”

## **The faster you fail, the closer you are to success**

Being bold and pushing the boundaries of innovation means detours, challenges, and yes, failure. What separates the good from the great is a willingness to embrace purposeful risk-taking as a necessity for success. TJ has always been intrigued by the idea of “failing fast,” introduced to her by Harvard Business School professor Amy Edmondson. It means that in some contexts, being comfortable and strategic about the risks you take, even when they may not lead to success, can open the doors to creativity and innovation.

“When things don’t go your way, it’s important to be willing to quickly adapt, pivot and not feel discouraged that you

tried something new or bold,” said TJ. “That’s the true mark of resiliency.”

For most people, stepping outside their comfort zone can feel incredibly uncomfortable and even debilitating, and an eye-opening experience with her kids encouraged TJ to further explore the power of failure.

“When my kids began playing sports, I saw that the fears they had of losing and not living up to expectations was holding them back. I realized I needed to practice what I was preaching, so I began showing them that it’s okay to take risks, express ideas and concerns, speak up with questions, and admit mistakes – all without fear of negative consequences. And now I bring that mindset to my own team’s approach to culture, development, and patient care.”

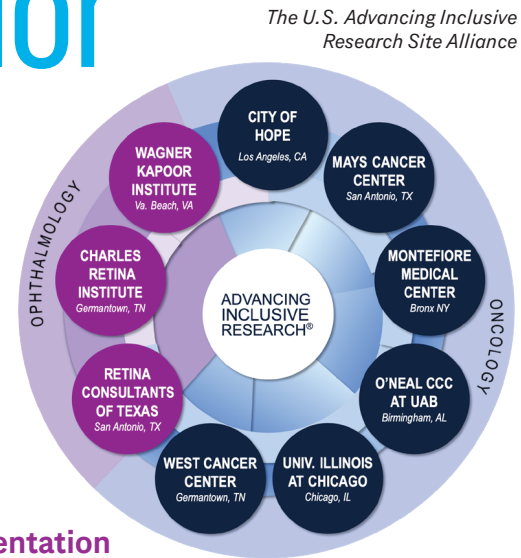
With a commitment to keep growing, learning, and elevating her colleagues, there’s no limit to what TJ will continue to accomplish alongside her peers on behalf of patients living with serious chronic conditions.

“It’s incredibly rewarding and exciting to be a part of a company driving change for more patients than ever before. And not knowing where my path will lead but being confident that wherever it is, I’ll meet it with an open mind, is a result of having an amazing network and support system. I encourage everyone to seek that out for themselves. The future of healthcare is ours to shape, and as long as we never stop learning, the possibilities are endless,” she concluded. ●

# Improving access to clinical studies for communities of color

## Our Vision: Delivering Improved Health Outcomes for All

Genentech, a member of the Roche Group, is a leading biotechnology company pursuing groundbreaking science to discover and develop medicines for people with serious and life-threatening diseases. In 2021, Genentech launched a coalition of clinical research sites called the Advancing Inclusive Research<sup>®</sup> Site Alliance to make clinical studies more accessible to communities of color.



## Unique Approach: Meeting Patients Where They Are

For decades, Black and Hispanic/Latino populations have been underrepresented in clinical research. Of U.S. patients who participate in clinical trials, ~80% are Caucasian, even though non-Caucasians make up nearly 40% of the U.S. population.<sup>1,2</sup> To help remedy this disparity, Genentech partnered with six oncology and three ophthalmology sites located across seven cities with diverse populations.

When Wanda Alberson, a Memphis, Tennessee-area resident and school bus driver, started noticing changes in her vision, she knew that she had to take action. After speaking with her doctor, she was referred to Charles Retina Institute in Germantown, Tennessee, to explore potential participation in a clinical study. As an oncology survivor, Wanda was no stranger to the healthcare system but had reservations about participating in an ophthalmology clinical study. Although it was “scary at first,” especially the thought of receiving eye injections, Wanda elected to participate in the study after learning more about it and discussing it with her family. Wanda believed enrolling in the study would allow her to contribute to research and help others.

Wanda completed the clinical study and reported that the experience was a good one for her. Today, she continues to drive her school bus full of children and be an activist voice for other drivers in her community.

## Building Trust to Increase Representation

Many patients, especially from communities of color, have distrust in the healthcare system. Esmel Meeks, who leads the community outreach program at Wagner Kapoor Institute in Norfolk, Virginia, sees it every day. Esmel recognizes that to build trust with patients requires a continuous effort. That’s why the Institute works with trusted community institutions such as churches to provide free eye screenings for patients so that they can learn more about their eye health and risk factors.

Esmel believes that achieving health equity all starts with the patient.

Three years into this endeavor, progress is being made. **The Advancing Inclusive Research Site Alliance is enrolling Black and Hispanic/Latino patients twice as fast** as its peers on the same Genentech studies.

## The Future of Inclusive Research

Moving forward, Genentech plans to expand the site alliance into additional disease areas in hopes of having an even greater impact on patient outcomes. We are embedding inclusive research practices across our organization, deepening engagements with stakeholders across the healthcare system, and enhancing support for patients of all backgrounds. ●

*“I was glad to be in the study where I can learn more and be more aware of what’s going on with my eyesight.”*

### WANDA ALBERSON

School Bus Driver, Cancer Survivor and Ophthalmology Patient

*“Without patients, there are no new clinical studies. Without new clinical studies, there are no new drugs. And without new drugs, we can’t bridge the gap with health disparities that we have in our community.”*

### ESMEL MEEKS

Director of Sight Forever, Marketing and Communications, Wagner Kapoor Institute

<sup>1</sup>B.E. Turner, J.R. Steinberg, B.T. Weeks, F. Rodriguez, M.R. Cullen Race/ethnicity reporting and representation in US clinical trials: a cohort study *Lancet Reg. Health Am.* (2022), p. 11, 10.1016/j.lana.2022.100252

<sup>2</sup>Bureau USC Quick Facts <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/PST045222> (2023)

LEARN MORE ABOUT ADVANCING INCLUSIVE RESEARCH



# PUSHING THE BOUNDARIES OF SCIENCE, INNOVATION AND HEALTH EQUITY

## MY ADVICE FOR CREATING AN INCLUSIVE CULTURE THAT ENABLES US TO SOLVE THE WORLD'S MOST COMPLEX HEALTH CHALLENGES

- 1** Create safe spaces for people to be their authentic selves so they can innovate and boldly champion health equity initiatives.
- 2** Actively mentor and sponsor colleagues who have a passion for health equity and inclusion and advocate for their career growth.
- 3** Bring underrepresented employees to the decision-making table and ensure their voices are heard.

*“It energizes me to be part of a company that not only pushes the boundaries of science but also cultivates an inclusive environment that enables us to deliver equitable healthcare.”*

### BEATRIZ PEREZ SANS

*Head of Field Medical,  
U.S. Medical Affairs, Genentech*

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# Meeting With Success

How one leader built a business based on expertise and commitment to quality.

**A** **DRIENNE WILLIAMS LEADS SCARRITT GROUP, A COMPANY DEDICATED TO SUPPORTING** clinical research organizations and pharmaceutical companies through services such as Investigator Meetings, Patient Concierge Services, and Patient Recruitment.

## 25 YEARS OF PREMIUM SERVICE

With a background in the hospitality industry, Adrienne's passion for service inspired her to create a meeting planning company focused on exceptional support. When her father participated in a clinical trial that gave him an additional ten years of quality life, Adrienne recognized the profound impact these studies could have on patients and their families. This experience led her to focus the company's mission on supporting clinical trials. Leveraging her education, expertise, and strong industry reputation, Adrienne launched Scarritt Group from her home 25 years ago.

Under Adrienne's leadership, Scarritt Group has grown into an internationally respected organization, employing over 85 professionals worldwide. The company has successfully executed thousands of high-impact meetings, always placing a premium on service excellence.

## KEY FACTORS FOR SUCCESS

Williams embarked on this journey with a vision and an unwavering spirit. From humble beginnings, Scarritt Group has evolved into a powerhouse operating over 300 meetings annually.

Williams attributes success to several key factors:

- 1. Perseverance:** In facing challenges, we've remained resilient, overcoming obstacles with determination.
- 2. Breaking Barriers:** Williams continues challenging gender stereotypes, paving the way for others.
- 3. Dedication:** Our dedication and tireless efforts have been key to ensuring exceptional results for our clients throughout their journey.
- 4. Team Spirit:** At Scarritt Group, we hire only highly skilled professionals, many from luxury resorts, because their expertise enables us to deliver the exceptional service our clients deserve. Loyalty, humility, and kindness form the cornerstone of our relationships, ensuring that every interaction reflects our commitment to excellence.

Over the past 25 years, Scarritt Group Companies have become the trusted partner for many clients worldwide. ●

(left to right) From event design to the meticulous curation of details, Scarritt Group Companies are reliable partners. We are dedicated to providing outstanding service to our clients.



# Heritage and Health

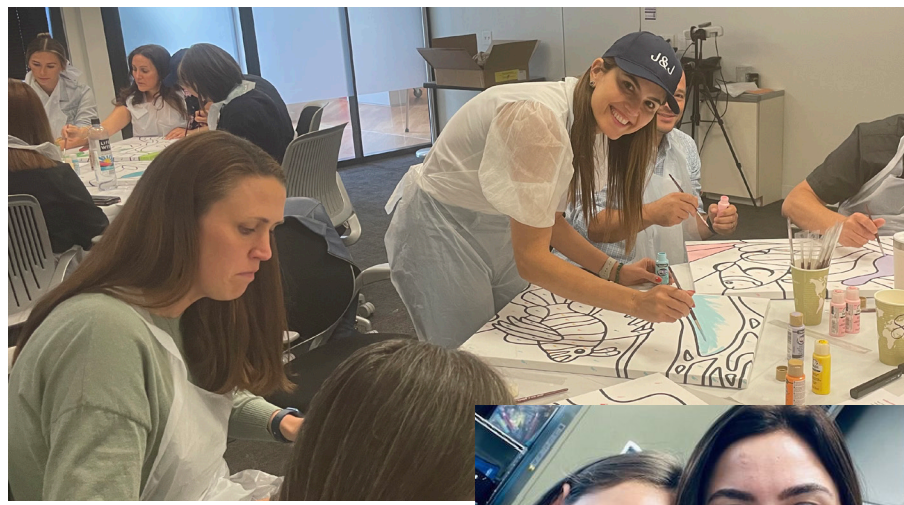
Juliana Nunes cultivates creative collaboration for common good.

**F**OR JULIANA NUNES, FAMILY AND HERITAGE GIVE DEFINITION TO both where she is from and where she is going. As Head of Talent Acquisition for Johnson & Johnson, she embraces belonging and purpose to cultivate communities that support creativity and collective well-being.

## Leading toward togetherness

Raised in Brazil, Juliana's own Latina heritage reflects a rich and diverse blend of cultures that includes Indigenous, Portuguese, European, and African influences. Her upbringing in a country that can celebrate so many different identities grounds her conviction that diversity is a source of strength. "Diverse perspectives and experiences lead to better decisions, and I actively seek to create opportunities for individuals from all backgrounds to contribute their unique insights," she says.





She delights in sharing her culture with colleagues and loves to learn about others' backgrounds as well, striving to create environments where all voices are valued. "I celebrate my Brazilian roots to foster understanding and appreciation," she says. "We can create a sense of belonging not by assimilating completely, but by embracing who we are and helping others understand other unique perspectives." Her goal as a leader is to inspire the people around her to achieve more than they thought was possible – often by seeing the unique qualities and individuality they bring to their role.

### Finding power in shared purpose

Juliana's cultural influences made her feel at home in an industry focused on health and healing. "In Brazilian culture, there is a strong sense of unity and support for one another," she says, noting that it grows into an emphasis on collective well-being and community.

First-hand experiences give her a very personal sense of purpose in that mission. When her father experienced an accident and subsequent extended hospitalization, the selfless teamwork she witnessed filled her with gratitude. "The tireless dedication and care provided by the nurses, doctors, and healthcare professionals had a profound impact on me," Juliana says. "That was the moment I realized I wanted to pursue a career in the pharmaceutical and life sciences industry."

**“BY LIFTING OTHERS AS YOU RISE, YOU CAN CREATE A MORE INCLUSIVE AND EQUITABLE FUTURE FOR ALL ASPIRING LATINA WOMEN IN THE FIELD.”**

### Innovation through harnessing creativity

One way she works to make a mark on the industry is by bringing together teams that can channel the creativity required for innovation and change in the face of dire need. "Growing up, I witnessed disparities in healthcare," she says. "I have seen the need for equitable access to lifesaving medications and treatments. It has instilled in me a passion for driving solutions that have the potential to improve the lives of underserved communities."

Those solutions are often grounded in unconstrained perspectives. "I encourage my team to explore unconventional solutions and challenge

the status quo," Juliana says. "I believe that the best ideas often come from unexpected sources, in a culture of inclusivity and collaboration."

Holding herself to that same creative standard, she embraces curiosity and learning. "I continuously seek out new knowledge," she says, and takes a particular interest in fields ranging from digital health to artificial intelligence – advancements that offer exciting opportunities to revolutionize the way we develop drugs, deliver care, and empower patients.

### Making connection contagious, igniting future leaders

She extends her curiosity – and her care – to the people around her, sharing thoughtful advice for fueling success. "The journey may not always be easy," she says, but she emphasizes that the difficulties often deliver the most important lessons. "Don't be discouraged by setbacks or obstacles. Instead, view them as opportunities for growth and learning."

Juliana also reminds us to always remember the power of one's own authentic experience. "Never be afraid to embrace and celebrate your unique strengths as a Latina woman," she says. "Your cultural background and experiences bring valuable perspectives."

Most importantly, don't let yourself be alone. "By lifting others as you rise, you can create a more inclusive and equitable future for all aspiring Latina women in the field," she says.

Juliana's broad experiences shape how she embraces the many roles she finds herself in today – as a mother, spouse, daughter, mentor, and leader. "Stay focused on your long-term goals and the impact you want to make in the world," she advises. "Believe in yourself, trust your abilities, and know that you can and will empower others to reach their full potential and contribute to a better, healthier, and more peaceful world for all." ●



# Amplifying Impact in Healthcare

Discovering the Power of Community-informed, Advocacy-focused Brand Solutions

**IN THE DYNAMIC WORLD OF HEALTHCARE MARKETING, ACHIEVING MEANINGFUL RESULTS DEMANDS MORE THAN JUST COMPELLING CAMPAIGNS.**

It requires a strategic approach that aligns with your organization's mission and values and actively contributes to the pursuit of health equity. By partnering with an advocacy-oriented communications agency, you can unlock a powerful synergy that elevates your brand, engages your audience, drives tangible impact, and fosters a more equitable healthcare landscape.

## Why Healthcare Marketers Succeed With Specialized Communications Partners

As a marketing communications leader, you understand the unique challenges of the healthcare industry. From navigating complex regulations to fostering trust with patients and providers, effective communication is paramount. A specialized communications partner offers the expertise and resources to complement your internal team, ensuring your messaging is accurate, impactful, and resonates.

Moreover, a strategic partnership frees up your team to focus on core marketing initiatives while the agency handles the intricacies of advocacy-driven communications. This collaborative approach streamlines workflows, optimizes resources, and maximizes your ROI.

### The Business Case for Advocacy-Based Communications

In addition to ethical and social benefits, an advocacy-based approach to healthcare communications can yield significant business advantages:

#### Strengthened Brand Reputation:

- 89% of consumers report they are more likely to switch to a brand associated with a good cause, given comparable price and quality.
- The Reputation Institute reports that companies with a strong reputation for social responsibility see an average increase of 6% in market value.

#### Expanded Market Reach & Patient Engagement:

- 70% of consumers in a recent Sprout Social survey shared that they want to know how brands are addressing social and environmental issues.
- 64% of patients say they are more likely to choose a healthcare provider that actively supports community health initiatives, according to Accenture.

## 5 KEY BENEFITS OF AN ADVOCACY-BUILDING FOCUS



Enhanced Brand Reputation & Trust



Increased Market Share & Patient Engagement



Employee Engagement & Retention



Improved Investor Relations & Financial Performance



Thought Leadership & Industry Influence

#### Talent Attraction & Retention:

- 70% of job seekers from a LinkedIn survey say a company's commitment to social responsibility influences their decision to work there.
- Companies with a strong ESG performance, according to the *Harvard Business Review*, experienced 25-50% lower employee turnover.

#### Investor Appeal & Financial Performance:

- Sustainable funds attracted a record \$51.1 billion of net new money in 2020, according to Morningstar.
- A recent McKinsey report showed that companies with strong ESG ratings outperform their peers by an average of 10% annually.

#### Thought Leadership & Industry Influence:

- Advocacy positions your organization as an industry leader in driving positive change, fostering collaborations and partnerships that amplify your reach and impact.

#### Selecting the Ideal Advocacy-Minded Communications Partner

Choosing the right partner requires a thoughtful assessment of your organization's goals, target audience, and communication priorities. An agency with a proven track record in healthcare advocacy shares a deep understanding of your industry with a passion for your mission and the pursuit of health equity.

#### Look for a partner who:

- Champions quality, patient-centric communication with culturally competent messaging
- Possesses meaningful expertise in healthcare advocacy and navigating health equity challenges
- Is committed to addressing health disparities and working alongside underserved communities
- Has experience mobilizing stakeholders and building coalitions
- Can effectively advance public health initiatives and promote preventive care

Partnering with an advocacy-minded communications agency gives you a strategic ally dedicated to amplifying your impact and advancing health equity. This approach not only enhances your marketing efforts but also strengthens your brand reputation, fosters trust with your audience, and positions your organization as a leader in driving positive change. Embrace the power of advocacy-driven communications and unlock new levels of success for your organization and the communities you serve.●



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Inside Edge Consulting Group

## Improve your reach into underserved communities through the Inside Edge Trustmaker Network

Drive greater participation of Black, Hispanic/Latino, Native American, and Asian patients in clinical trials—or even specific groups within these communities, like LGBTQ+ individuals.

Since 2004, Inside Edge Consulting Group has been building a customized suite of services to eliminate inequities in the way novel health products are evaluated, marketed, and accessed. Our teams will help you conduct more inclusive clinical studies, interact with diverse populations in culturally-resonant ways, and drive broad-based utilization for payer and provider strategies—all through our Trustmaker network.

At Inside Edge, we forge deep, human connections between underserved communities and medical innovators to create a healthy, just world.

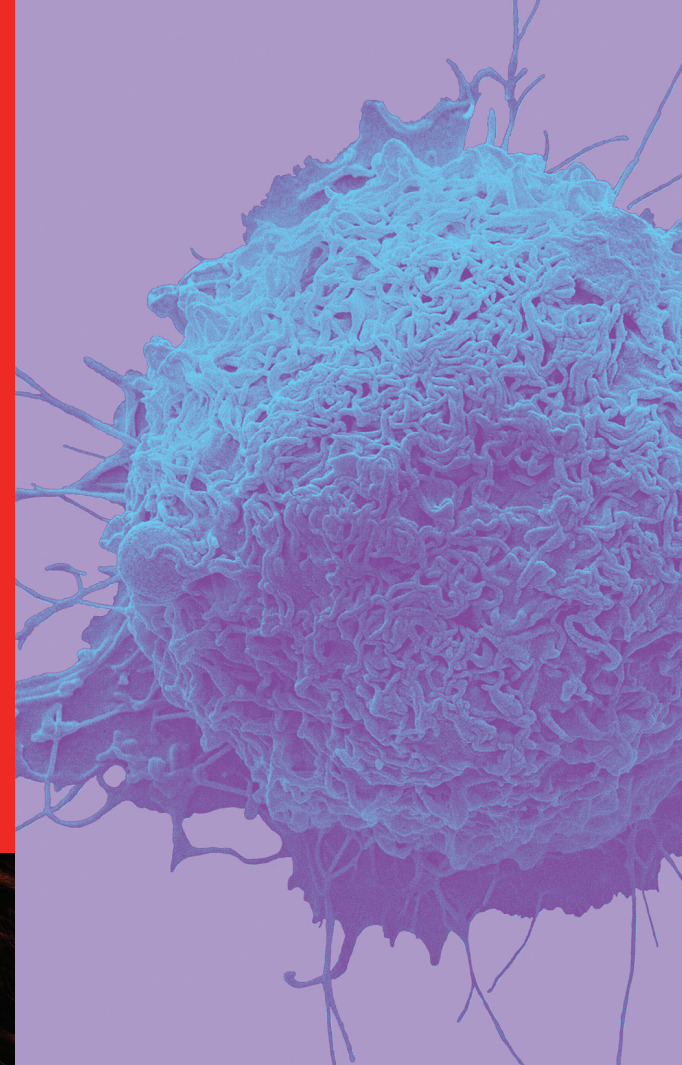
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the gap  
between  
communities  
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We believe  
health is  
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Shaping the

# Future

of Life Sciences

EXPLORE HOW EIGHT EXTRAORDINARY *Latinas Unidas* ARE TRANSFORMING THE LIFE SCIENCES INDUSTRY BY EMBRACING THEIR CULTURAL IDENTITIES AND FORGING ENDURING LEGACIES. THESE STORIES REVEAL THEIR RESILIENCE, INNOVATIVE CONTRIBUTIONS, AND THE POWERFUL IMPACT THEY'RE MAKING. GAIN VALUABLE INSIGHTS AND INSPIRATION FROM THEIR JOURNEYS TO EMPOWER YOUR OWN CAREER AND JOIN IN MAKING A COLLECTIVE DIFFERENCE.

WORDS BY ERIN C. PERKINS • PHOTOGRAPHY BY OLIVER COLLIER

Wanda Sharif

# A NURTURING SCIENTIST

Connecting  
Cultures

## MOMENT of IMPACT

Wanda is one of several scientific contributors in PubMed, a database of references and abstracts on life sciences and biomedical topics. She proudly distinguishes herself as one of the Black, Afro-Latina scientists to have published within her organizations, paving the way for future generations of diverse scientists.



**I**N THE VAST SCIENCE LANDSCAPE where discoveries shape the future and breakthroughs redefine possibilities, there's an undercurrent of the struggle for women of color, such as Latinas. Yet, within this realm of uncertainty, they emerge as beacons of resilience fueled by their rich cultural heritage and unwavering determination.

Wanda Sharif stands at the forefront of this narrative. As a Black, Panamanian, Afro-Latina woman, she is an inspiring example in the life biopharma industry. Her journey, marked by trials and triumphs, reflects the essence of perseverance and cultural pride.

Embarking on a journey fueled by her mother's simple yet profound gift, Wanda Sharif ignited her passion for science at a very young age.

"My mom was very invested in education," Wanda reflects. "She took me to the Natural History Museum and bought me my first microscope when I was 13. That's where my love affair with science truly began."

## Transitioning Paths: From Veterinary Aspirations to Research Science

**THAT EVENTUALLY LED HER** to Tuskegee University, a historically Black institution.

"My journey began as a pre-veterinary medicine and agriculture major," Wanda recounts. "Although veterinary school didn't materialize as

my future, I found a new purpose as a research scientist."

Her transition from aspiring veterinarian to research scientist wasn't just a change in career path; it was a testament to her adaptability and passion for making a difference. Through her work, Wanda discovered a profound sense of purpose in contributing to finding therapies and cures.

## Making a Difference: The Impact of Transformative Therapies

**AS A SENIOR SCIENTIST** at a pharmaceutical company, Wanda is part of groundbreaking projects with the potential to transform lives. "What fills me with immense pride is being part of an organization that has developed transformative drugs," she reflects. The impact of these therapies means individuals like Wanda, who deals with eczema and asthma, can find relief from such conditions. "As a bench scientist, I have seen various strategies for combating diseases, which fills me with hope."

## Overcoming Adversity: Embracing Change and Resilience

**YET, WANDA'S JOURNEY** hasn't been without its share of obstacles. "One of the most challenging periods in my career was when I was downsized from my previous organization," she recalls. Amid personal turmoil and professional setbacks, Wanda faced a crossroads—succumb to despair or embrace change.

"I chose the latter," she affirms. "I co-hosted a blog talk radio show called 'Own Your Career'... and ventured into consulting." Wanda embraced new opportunities through these endeavors and inspired others to take control of their careers and pursue their dreams.

## Cultural Enrichment: Embodying Diversity in Science

**HER MULTICULTURAL BACKGROUND** enriches her approach to science, leadership, and community



science education.

“My life is guided by a set of core values, the most significant of which is faith in a higher power,” she shares. Drawing strength from her faith, Wanda navigates the challenges of being a research scientist with resilience and grace. Her commitment to servant leadership, instilled by her mother’s example, drives her to empower others and uplift her community.

**Legacy of Leadership:  
Inspiring Latina Leaders  
in Biopharma**

**REFLECTING ON HER JOURNEY,** Wanda emphasizes embracing cultural heritage while pursuing professional goals. “We need more diversity in research science and medicine,” she asserts. “I continue to work on publishing efforts, hoping to inspire young Black and Latina women in the field of science.”

In her continued efforts to advance diversity and representation in the pharmaceutical industry, Wanda recognized the collective impact of organizations like WOCIP. “Never would I ever have met a collective of women

who are leading in the industry as change agents in the advancement of women of color in pharmaceutical in the U.S and globally if it wasn’t for WOCIP,” she affirmed, acknowledging the pivotal role of such communities in driving progress and empowerment. “Together, we are rewriting the narrative for women of color in pharmaceuticals, both in the U.S. and globally.” ●

engagement. “As a Black, Afro-Latina scientist, I wear many hats and believe that I must embody the change I wish to see in the world,” she declares.

In times of uncertainty, Wanda draws strength from her heritage and the support of her community. “My resilience is fueled by continuous learning,” she asserts. “I am convinced that where there’s a will, there’s a way.”

**Community Engagement:  
Educating and Empowering Others**

**HER DEDICATION TO EDUCATING AND EMPOWERING** her community extends beyond the laboratory. In 2020, as the COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately affected Black and Brown communities, Wanda took action to educate her community about the virus. Using her scientific expertise, she developed engaging presentations and became a certified speaker on APOL1-mediated kidney disease, advocating for health awareness and

**HEAR WANDA IN  
HER OWN WORDS**

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*Dolca Thomas*



*The Power of Diverse*  
**PERSPECTIVES**

**D** R. DOLCA THOMAS IS SHATTERING the glass ceiling in an industry where Black women and Latinas rarely hold leadership positions. Her journey—from early research at Cornell University to her work as an immunologist, transplant nephrologist, and now a biopharma

executive—has been marked by a relentless commitment to diversity.

Dolca advocates for diverse representation in clinical research, a crucial step toward achieving accurate and effective outcomes. Statistics highlight the urgent need for her work: Blacks make up over 13% of the U.S. population but only



# “I unapologetically showed up as myself.”

7% of clinical trial participants, while Hispanics/Latinos represent 18% of the population but only 11% of participants.

Dolca’s commitment to expanding leadership opportunities and championing diversity is rooted in her early life experiences. Growing up in Washington Heights, New York City, as the eldest child of non-college-educated and non-English-speaking, Dominican immigrants, she navigated challenges like accessing healthcare, registering for school, and obtaining a driver’s license, among other things for her family. At 16, she balanced managing a McDonald’s job with academic excellence, paving her way to higher education.

By 2008, when Dolca entered the pharmaceutical industry, her life experiences had fostered an unshakeable confidence and strength. This, coupled with a bit of serendipity, propelled her career both as an executive and a mentor. “I unapologetically showed up as myself and wasn’t afraid to question authority,” Dolca reflects.

A pivotal moment occurred when Dolca met Dr. Charlotte Jones-Burton, also a nephrologist and Director at Bristol Myers Squibb (BMS). Their placement on the same team was a rarity, highlighting the scarcity of women of color in the industry. Their shared experiences navigating unspoken barriers and advocating for inclusivity forged a bond that would spark significant change in their careers and lives.

After leaving BMS for Pfizer, Dolca casually met with Charlotte over cheesecake in New York City. Charlotte shared her vision for an organization empower-

ing women of color in life sciences, and Dolca was immediately on board. “I told her it was a great idea and to go for it,” she recalls, adding that Charlotte asked her to speak at the organization’s inaugural talk, “Know Your Value and Worth,” which had a small group of women in attendance – a stark reminder of their underrepresentation in the industry, but also the power of collective strength. That day’s energy laid the foundation for the key tenet of WOCIP’s culture: a supportive space where women of color could uplift each other, share business insights, reshape the pharma industry, and broaden their reach.

Despite the challenges of a demanding career and being a mother of two, Dolca never wavered in her ambition. “Sometimes opportunities arise when you least expect them,” she reflects. “You’d be surprised how supportive your family can be.” This proved true when she relocated to Switzerland as Roche’s VP and Global Head of Translational Medicine for Immunology, Inflammation, and Infectious Disease. The role expanded her perspective, underscoring the importance of global, not just U.S.-centric, decision-making in clinical trials.

Dolca believes diverse voices in trial design—from site selection to methodology—are crucial for understanding drug efficacy across all populations, not just white males. She’s confident that diversifying decision-makers will lead to better representation and understanding in the field. While she’s guided by the strong belief that diversity is essential, she acknowledges

## MOMENT of IMPACT

I stayed in touch with Charlotte, and during a meeting at Junior’s Restaurant and Bakery in New York City, she shared her vision for what would become WOCIP. She asked me to be its inaugural speaker, and I gave a talk on “Know Your Value and Your Worth” to a small group in a conference room.



that its full impact won’t be realized until more women of color have a seat at the table.

After returning from Switzerland to the Bay Area, where she now lives with her family and beloved pit terrier Bambi, Dolca has continued to pursue leadership roles in pioneering biotech firms where she can influence change—from Executive Vice President and Chief Medical Officer at Principia to a board director at Chinook, and now a venture partner at Samsara Biocapital. Each experience has taught her valuable lessons that she shares to remind others of their worth. “Don’t be afraid to ask for what you want, and don’t be afraid to leave if you don’t feel you are reaching your potential,” she advises. “You always underestimate your worth – don’t give that up to anyone.”

Through WOCIP, Dolca empowers other women of color, sharing hard-won wisdom from her mentors: know your worth and demand fair compensation. “I’ve always known my initial offer is typically 25% less than what my white male counterparts receive,” she states. “I also remind women that they don’t need to check every box for a new opportunity—they’re often overqualified. If it feels like a stretch, it’s probably the right move. Just go for it! And if you get a ‘no,’ so what? Finally, never accept a job based on a promised promotion; get it in writing with a clear timeline.”

As a biotech executive, board member, and physician-scientist, Dolca remains committed to empowering the next generation of leaders. Her story is one of perseverance, authenticity, and unwavering belief in the value of diversity. In a world where women of color are often told to wait their turn, Dolca’s message is clear: know your worth and never settle for less. ●

Jacqueline Gerena

Triumphing Over  
Challenges,

# SHAPING LEGACIES

## MOMENT of IMPACT

Because of WOCIP, Jackie was able to travel to Africa and see firsthand the capabilities of their diverse healthcare systems. This experience broadened her perspective and deepened her understanding of the global impact of the pharmaceutical industry.

**J**ACQUELINE “JACKIE” GERENA’S LEADERSHIP STYLE is a unique blend of empathy, mentorship, and a celebration of individuality. This “sazón,” as she calls it, isn’t just her secret ingredient; it’s a philosophy she believes can unlock success for everyone. Jackie’s journey from a hesitant newcomer to a seasoned director in the pharmaceutical industry is a testament to the power of embracing one’s own unique spice.

Although initially hesitant about transitioning into an unfamiliar field, Jackie was ultimately drawn to the bio-pharma industry by the chance to contribute to the safe use of and patient access to life-saving therapies. Now a director specializing in risk management, she adeptly combines technical expertise, strategic acumen, strong communication, and unwavering ethical leadership.

At the core of Jackie’s leadership are values instilled by her family: integrity, humility, respect, and honesty. “As a woman of Puerto Rican descent, I understand that my success is not merely personal; it carries the weight of representing my parents, culture, women, first-generation individuals, and those who have faced adversity,” Jackie reflects.

Growing up amidst challenges, Jackie embodies resilience rooted in her cultural upbringing. “My parents’ house was always open to everyone,” Jackie recalls. “They taught me that where there’s a will, there’s a way, and that we have to support each other.” This emphasis on community and unwavering support has shaped her into the servant leader she is today, influencing her industry’s leadership landscape.



## A Space for Latinas to Thrive

**I**NSPIRED BY the warmth and connection of sharing “cafecito con leche,” WOCIP Cafecito con Leche is a supportive space for Latinas within the WOCIP community. Co-founded by Jackie Gerena and Marissa Quinones, this initiative fosters open dialogue and reflection through engaging discussions on topics like diversity in clinical trials and the unique experiences of Latinas in the industry. It’s a safe haven for members to share their stories, seek advice, and connect with one another.

Jackie is passionate about paving the way for her two daughters. “For my daughters, the sky’s the limit,” Jackie declares. “I want them to know that they can do as much or as little as they want, and that no one should ever make them feel less than.” Her commitment to mentoring and volunteering reflects her belief in representation and community. “Representation matters for women and people of color,” Jackie emphasizes. “Everyone puts a little bit in, and everybody’s little bit makes a movement.”

Jackie’s involvement with WOCIP has been instrumental in her growth. As a Latina woman in pharma, she felt a personal obligation to educate and advocate for her community during the COVID-19 pandemic, reflecting her unwavering dedication to serving others.

Jackie Gerena’s journey is a testament to the power of resilience,

cultural values, and service. She has shattered ceilings and become an inspiration for young Latinas and Afro-Latinas. “As you navigate your professional endeavors, keep the flame of success burning bright, not just for yourself, but for all the little brown and black girls who will follow in your footsteps,” Jackie encourages.

Jackie’s journey, marked by self-acceptance and a deep commitment to community, leaves behind a powerful legacy, inspiring others to celebrate their uniqueness and find fulfillment in serving others. ●

### HEAR JACKIE IN HER OWN WORDS

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# Wanda Shoer

## BRIDGING CULTURES & Empowering Communities



**W**ANDA SHOER’S PASSION for empowerment began in Lawrence, Massachusetts’ Latino community. As a young “ambassador,” she bridged worlds, translating for elders and encouraging civic participation. These experiences fueled her mission to dismantle cultural barriers and harness the power of medicine for collective upliftment.

Raised in the Dominican Republic until age eight, Wanda embraces dual identities. Her immigrant parents’ commitment to community drives her to uplift others. Wanda’s blend of cultural insight and corporate savvy makes her a champion for underrepresented voices and an inspiring role model for Latinas in STEM.

### A Passion for Science, a Drive to Help

**WANDA’S CURIOSITY AND** drive to improve health outcomes led her to biopharma. “The biopharma industry allows me to play a vital role in enabling the development of life-saving medications, even without a traditional science background,” she says. The intellectual challenges and dynamic environment fueled her passion for a career driven by innovation and purpose.

A pivotal sponsorship early in Wanda’s career shaped her path when a leader recognized her potential. “It wasn’t just about getting a seat at the table,” Wanda

**MOMENT  
of IMPACT**

WOCIP provided Wanda with solace, expanded perspectives, and fostered friendships. Recognizing the power of representation, she embraces sharing stories as a responsibility.



explains, “but having someone who believed in me and helped me discover my strengths.” This experience underscored the difference between mentorship and sponsorship, with sponsors advocating for advancement.

As Chief Learning Officer at Sanofi, Wanda champions a learning culture rooted in inclusion, curiosity, and growth. Finding a company that empowers diverse voices was paramount. “It was my top priority to work at a company with the same passion for people and where diversity is celebrated and honored,” she says.

That’s when she found Sanofi.

It’s a company that holds itself accountable to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DE&I), with a DE&I Board dominated by external experts and strong employee representation. The company launched A Million Conversations (AMC): the €50m commitment to building trust in healthcare with marginalized communities by building bridges to policymakers and supporting the next generation of healthcare leaders in 10 countries.

Wanda’s early experience at Sanofi highlighted listening as key to inclusivity. Joining an employee resource group (ERG), she saw top executives supporting their initiatives and felt empowered as leaders acted on their feedback. She also participated in AMC dialogues, aimed at creating equitable healthcare. “Everywhere you look, DE&I stands out as a big ambition for the company. Sanofi wants its leadership to reflect the diversity of its communities and its employees to realize their full potential, all in service of its ambition to transform medicine for people globally. It’s a big ask, but there is an unwavering commitment at the top and real momentum building at the grassroots level. I believe they can do it. And I want to be a part of it.”

**Leading the Way:  
A Legacy of Achievements**

**WANDA’S VISIONARY LEADERSHIP** shines through her work with Unveiled: Bridging the Gap to Sponsorship, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit. Her lega-

cy includes creating a Communications and Outreach Advisory Council to enhance the organization’s impact.

“Unveiled” is a pioneering force dismantling barriers to diverse leadership. Founded on the belief that everyone deserves a chance and sponsorship is a powerful tool, it harnesses data and network analysis to enable equitable access to opportunities, empowering under-represented groups. More than an organization, Unveiled is a catalyst for change and a testament to Wanda’s unwavering commitment to progress.

**Overcoming Challenges:  
Lessons Learned**

**WANDA LEARNED TO** take risks, overcome fear, and adapt. By addressing distrust in healthcare, she employed a holistic approach, building networks beyond traditional settings. WOCIP reinforced the power of shared stories and the multifaceted roles of Latinas. For Wanda, success is a collective achievement shaped by the positive, supportive influence of family and friends, rooted in her cultural background: “Success isn’t achieved alone; it’s a testament to the support system that uplifts us,” she explains.

**Empowering the Next Generation**

**WANDA ADVISES YOUNG** Latinas and Afro-Latinas: “Embrace your journey and cultural heritage. It’s your strength. Take space, honor your growth, and claim your power.” ●



**HEAR WANDA IN  
HER OWN WORDS**

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Diane Gomez-Thinnes

# EMBRACING

*Her Roots, Transforming Healthcare*



**F**ROM THE CONCRETE JUNGLES of central New Jersey to the forefront of transformational healthcare innovation, Diane Gomez-Thinnes' journey is a testament to the power of embracing one's roots and using them as a driving force for positive change.

It was Frida Kahlo, a Mexican painter known for her incredible self-portraits, who proclaimed, "At the end of the day, we can endure much more than we think we can." Diane lives up to this personally and professionally. She's a first-generation, Latina college graduate in her fam-

ily with humble roots. Growing up in a working-class Latino community, the American Dream resonated deeply.

"My immigrant parents, hailing from Ecuador and Mexico, sought opportunity in this country. Growing up in a lower-income, Spanish-speaking New Jersey community ignited my passion for servant leadership. My dad summed it up perfectly: "Mi hija, you can be President or Miss Universe!" Diane recalls, adding that this blend of ambition and community defines Latino culture. "I witnessed a tireless work ethic at church, folks with multiple

jobs, double shifts at the factory, cutting coupons, and helping each other. My parents served as church leaders. As Latinos, our foundation is family and faith and possibility. We are bridge builders, risk-takers, charting our own paths."

Diane's path into healthcare was not a conventional one. Armed with a degree in chemical engineering and a certificate in Latin American Studies from Princeton University, she initially embarked on a career in the gas and oil industry—work that translated into a real, practical, and tangible job for an immigrant family wanting to advance. However, a deep desire to connect

more personally with her work and contribute to a greater purpose prompted her to pivot. Following MBA studies at the Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University, entering healthcare allowed her to combine her scientific background with her newfound interests in strategy, marketing, and business. "I could do good in the world by bringing lifesaving or life-improving technologies to market," explains Diane, who is passionate about innovation in the medical devices arena. She is an accomplished president and C-suite executive with global P&L experience across public and private sectors, including start-ups and Fortune 40 companies.

Fueled by her immigrant upbringing and the values instilled by her parents—humility, resilience, optimism, and a relentless drive for problem-solving—Diane has been at the forefront of revolutionary healthcare innovations. From joining the team that launched the world's first drug-eluting stent that transformed interventional cardiology to introducing groundbreaking treatments for hemorrhagic stroke and life-threatening bleeding and the first prescrip-

## **MOMENT of IMPACT**

Often, we focus intently on our work, striving to fit in and make a business impact. When I was named an honoree with Medical Marketing and Media (MM&M) Hall of Femme as President Mentor at Johnson & Johnson, I met WOCIP's founder, Charlotte Jones-Burton, a fellow honoree. In that moment, I realized the opportunities for women of color in the MedTech/pharma industry. Imagine the possibilities.

tion digital therapeutic for Type II diabetes, her contributions have had a profound impact on countless lives.

Yet as a Latina navigating male-dominated industries in oil and MedTech, she has faced numerous obstacles. However, her determination and willingness to step out of her comfort zone have fueled her growth. "Stepping out took great courage," she acknowledges. "No longer are all your champions around. No longer are you operating under a consistent set of cultural norms."

In the face of adversity, Diane turns to the wisdom of her cultural roots. Building diverse teams, fostering relationships, and staying connected to customers and patients have been her guiding

principles.

At the core of Diane's leadership philosophy lies a deep understanding of the changing dynamics of the modern world. "Leadership has transformed, requiring more cooperation, collaboration, and collective problem-solving," she explains. "This requires leading from the center and not the top. This requires comfort, not just tolerance of diversity."

Diane's advice to aspiring leaders is rooted in her own experiences and the wisdom she has garnered along the way. "Exposure starts with performance," she emphasizes. "Build your network and solicit feedback along the way." She encourages others to embrace opportunities, trust in themselves, and celebrate the multifaceted aspects of their identities.

In the words of Maya Angelou, a guiding light for Diane, "I learned a long time ago that the wisest thing I can do is be on my own side; be an advocate for myself and others like me." Diane embodies this sentiment as living proof that with determination, resourcefulness, and a commitment to one's story, anything is possible. ●

# Wendy Perdomo

# BEACON

## *of Transformation & Empowerment*

**F**ROM THE VIBRANT STREETS OF HARLEM where she grew up, Wendy Perdomo's innate gift for guiding others towards breakthroughs shone bright, a radiant presence exuding warmth and wisdom – a tapestry woven with the rich threads of her Afro-Latina heritage and Dominican ancestry. Even in her high school days, classmates and peers were drawn to her uplifting spirit, seeking her wisdom to navigate their woes and unlock their true potential.

As the daughter of Dominican immigrants, Wendy's parents instilled the values of hard work and community support. "Growing up I also saw that being in the hood had its limitations," Wendy shares.

Witnessing these limitations motivated her to give back by assisting peers with resume writing, advocacy, and translation services for her Spanish-speaking parents. "Helping my parents in this way created a strong orientation for serving and supporting the underserved and doing mission driven work," Wendy says. "I started to love the ability to help others and support them especially when I saw the difference it was making in their lives."

Today, as an executive coach who owns Coaching Women of Color, LLC, and facilitates WOCIP's Global Leadership Accelerator program (Accelerator), Wendy's brilliance lies in her ability to harness the power of embracing one's unique inner power and cultural heritage while forging a path that uplifts and empowers others.

"Through my coaching practice and my facilitation,

I have the unique opportunity to empower and support women of color in elevating their personal and professional lives and amplifying their executive presence and brand," Wendy explains. "This community provides a safe space for women of color to truly be their authentic selves, to be valued, seen and heard and at times for the first time in their careers so how can you not be a part of something this great."

Wendy's journey from an undervalued academia position to her role as an executive coach is a testament to her resilience and the transformative power of personal breakthroughs. She experienced a pivotal breakthrough during a divorce, which led her to question traditional career paths and discover her calling in coaching.

Her coaching practice emerged from a realization that women of color often don't have the luxury of breaking down; they carry the weight of expectations and societal pressures. Wendy felt a calling to support others like her. Introducing herself to personal transformation through a personal development program, Wendy delved into ontology (the study of being), creating an urgency to take meaningful action.

Wendy's investment in her own growth was a commitment to support others in their paths. One of Wendy's coaching success stories involves guiding a friend from high school in crafting an effective exit strategy from an undervaluing organization, ultimately leading her to a higher role after gaining experience elsewhere.

### MOMENT of IMPACT

Last year, in her commitment to amplify the voices and presence of women of color, she conducted virtual workshops centered on team leadership, equity, and sustainability, with a primary focus on building confidence.

Rooted in her Afro-Latina identity of Dominican descent and shaped by her Harlem upbringing, Wendy developed a resilience that shaped her leadership. She recognizes the immigrant work-hard mentality that has shaped her yet advocates for a more sustainable approach. Wendy believes in the importance of self-care, a component she seeks to amplify in her program. Her intention is to manifest manageable self-care practices and encourage women to take up space, demand their value, and sustain themselves in environments where they may not always feel safe.

"By virtue of sharing your perspectives and embracing your identity, you bring attributes, and experiences that are uniquely your own to the table," she says.

Wendy is more than just an executive coach; she is a catalyst for transformation, a champion for women of color, and a beacon of strength, showing that breakthroughs are not just possible – they are essential for personal and professional growth, and the key to unlocking one's true, authentic power. ●

### HEAR WENDY IN HER OWN WORDS

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Marissa Quinones

# PRESCRIPTION

*for Empowerment and Resilience*

**I**N A SMALL TEXAN TOWN, Marissa Quinones grew up in a tight Hispanic community where camaraderie flourished, yet aspirations often felt limited. While higher education was common, the expectation was to return and serve the community. However, Marissa envisioned broader horizons. Inspired by her father's educational journey through the Navy and the GI Bill, he instilled the importance of independence and learning. His question, "You either learn to say, 'You want fries with that?' or go to school," resonated deeply with Marissa. For her, the choice was clear.

**MOMENT of IMPACT**  
Launched the "Alumni Sisters Developing Leaders" conference, an event aimed to empower Latina college students with insights on leadership, self-care, resume building, interviewing skills, and effective communication.

## Defying Expectations

"AS A LATINA, I recognize the necessity to surpass challenges and work diligently to pursue our dreams. Being the leaders of our families and communities, Latinas like me often find themselves taking on responsibilities beyond the conventional roles," Marissa says. "While my grandmother and mother were homemakers, I aspired to forge a distinct path."

Drawn to science, Marissa would accompany her nurse mother to the lab. "My mother, a nurse, inadvertently became the first scientist in our family," she explains. "As the first woman in her family to earn a science degree, she unknowingly laid the groundwork for my journey, and now I see myself paving the way for future generations."

Despite her community's limited career expectations, Marissa defied the odds. Once aspiring to be a teacher, she became a community pharmacist, yet her commitment to her roots remained steadfast.

## Career Evolution

**MARISSA'S PHARMACY CAREER** began in academia and clinical practice, focusing on underserved populations. She transitioned to the pharmaceutical industry to make a broader impact, eventually becoming a director of medical affairs.

"What motivates and sustains my engagement in the biopharma industry is the knowledge that I am effecting positive change in the lives of patients," Marissa says. "The foundation of the Latino community, rooted in hard work, resilience, and dedication, has significantly shaped my perspectives on science, leadership, and community engagement."

Her career choices were inspired by the struggles her parents faced with cancer, underscoring the absence of accessible healthcare in small towns.

## Empowering Communities

**AS A MOTHER OF FOUR** with a supportive husband, Marissa embodies the possibilities she saw growing up. Her career spans from clinical pharmacy to the pharmaceutical industry, showcasing her resilience and determination.

Initially only encountering a few Latinas in the pharmaceutical world, she joined WOCIP, understanding the importance of self-development when resources are scarce. Together with alumni sisters, she initiated a conference to empower the next generation.

Marissa's involvement with WOCIP transformed her professionally and provided a platform to amplify her voice within her community. She now encourages other women, especially those juggling multiple roles, to join and contribute.

## Authenticity and Empowerment

"**EMBRACING MY LATINA IDENTITY** allows me to be a distinct voice, emphasizing the importance of inclusion, especially in areas such as clinical trials where diverse representation is crucial," Marissa says. "Success, for me, goes beyond personal achievements; it extends to being a catalyst for change and ensuring that the Latino community is represented and heard." ●



## HEAR MARISSA IN HER OWN WORDS

Scan the QR Code to access an exclusive interview excerpt and watch more original videos from this issue.

Charlotte  
Jones-Burton

*Empowering  
Latinas in*

# LIFE SCIENCES

**O**VER CHEESECAKE IN A BUSTLING New York restaurant, Dr. Charlotte Jones-Burton shared a vision with her mentor, Dr. Dolca Thomas: a space for women of color in pharma to unite and thrive. Driven by her own experiences, Charlotte's passion resonated with Dolca. "I told her it was a great idea and to go for it," recalls Dolca, who later opened her home to host gatherings for what would become WOCIP.

### The Spark of Change

**CHARLOTTE'S PATH TO REALIZING HER VISION** has been one of resilience and transformation. A trailblazer in pharmaceuticals, a biopharmaceutical executive, healthcare leader, advocate, and entrepreneur, she founded WOCIP







Dr. Charlotte Jones-Burton connects with Latina leaders at the 2021 in person Cafecito Con Leche event in Long Branch, NJ.

to empower women of color facing marginalization, uniting them around their shared experiences and determination to change the narrative.

Charlotte initially planned to open a clinical practice after medical school. However, when she received a research grant from the National Institutes of Health, she re-directed her focus to clinical research, first at the University of Maryland and later in the pharmaceutical industry. She transitioned from a physician to an executive in drug development. Now, she is an entrepreneur and partner, serving on several boards, including the Member Board of Trustees for the American Kidney Fund.

Her story, rooted in personal experiences and a commitment to equity, has inspired many women of color, especially Latinas, to strive for success in an industry that often overlooks their talents. A 2024 Lean In report reveals that Latinas remain underrepresented in senior roles, with only one percent in C-suite positions. Latinas, alongside Black women, face the biggest barriers at the first step toward management—only 74 Latinas are promoted for every 100 men. Contributing factors include limited access to mentorship, networking, and persistent wage gaps.

### Charlotte's Journey of Resilience

Charlotte's journey highlights the systemic challenges women of color face. Growing up in rural Arkansas with limited resources, then moving to affluent Shaker

Heights, Ohio, exposed her to stark disparities in opportunity. "I harbored guilt because of that," Charlotte reflects. "I think that shapes everything that I do. When possible, I challenge that." These experiences gave her a deep understanding of how marginalization impacts wealth, education, health, and careers, driving her to challenge the status quo through WOCIP.

WOCIP was born from this understanding, a groundbreaking initiative that embraces diversity within diversity. WOCIP recognizes the unique identities within both the Latino and Black communities, challenging the assumption that these groups are monolithic. This awareness fosters a deeper understanding and appreciation of their strength and complexity. Recognizing that Latina is a broad category, and Afro-Latinas face additional layers of marginalization, WOCIP intentionally fosters inclusivity. The organization welcomes Black women, Afro-Latinas, and Latinas, acknowledging their unique cultural and professional challenges.

### Inclusive Initiatives for Empowerment

Charlotte's focus on fairness and representation is evident in WOCIP's diverse leadership and membership. "We strive for inclusion of Latinas on our Board and Advisory Council so people see themselves in our leadership and want to join," she emphasizes. This is reflected in WOCIP's programs like "Cafecito con Leche" and the "In the Know" podcast, which highlight Latinas and their culture.

WOCIP's efforts extend beyond the U.S. to Africa and Europe, with plans for global expansion, including Puerto Rico, Brazil, and Argentina. Charlotte envisions Latinas becoming more visible in life sciences leadership. "We're successful if all members see themselves in every aspect of the organization." This global reach will empower women worldwide and advance healthcare for all.

### Mentorship: A Key to Success

Key figures like Denice Torres, Virginia Lazala, and Cristina Santos have profoundly influenced Charlotte's career and vision for WOCIP. Denice, a bold leader, mentored Charlotte and advocated for her advancement, highlighting the importance of sponsorship.

"Charlotte is a force of nature," says Denice, recalling Charlotte's passion in founding WOCIP alongside its eight founding members. "She and Pat answered the call for equity and representation. I've watched Charlotte serve as a champion, role model, and leader. I also appreciate her goodness and the way she talks about her family."

Another influential mentor, Virginia Lazala, provided insights into the nuances of the Latinx community, while Cristina Santos exemplified the power of collective action.

At a dinner Virginia hosted to introduce Charlotte and WOCIP to Latinas in the industry, someone remarked, "But I'm not a person of color." Virginia's response, "You are. You just don't realize it," highlighted the need for WOCIP to combat unconscious bias and promote inclusion. As Virginia notes, "Having Latinas find their voice brings the industry closer to the goal of serving every patient in need."

Charlotte's mentorship of Marissa Quinones, Lorena Kuri, and Jackie Garena underscores her commitment to representation and equity. Their experiences highlight WOCIP's mission and reinforce Charlotte's dedication to empowering women of color in life sciences.

Lorena shared how Charlotte's support guided her through professional and personal challenges during the pandemic. "Charlotte's simple question, 'How are

you?' gave me permission to grieve and grow," Lorena recalls. "She reminded me I could pivot and become a thought leader."



Dr. Charlotte Jones-Burton and WOCIP leaders pose for a photo at the 2022 WOCIP Brunch in celebration of Hispanic Heritage Month.

Charlotte is committed to empowering more Latinas to join WOCIP, benefiting from its unique culture, robust programs, and one-of-a-kind events while helping increase Latina representation among C-suite executives beyond the current one percent.

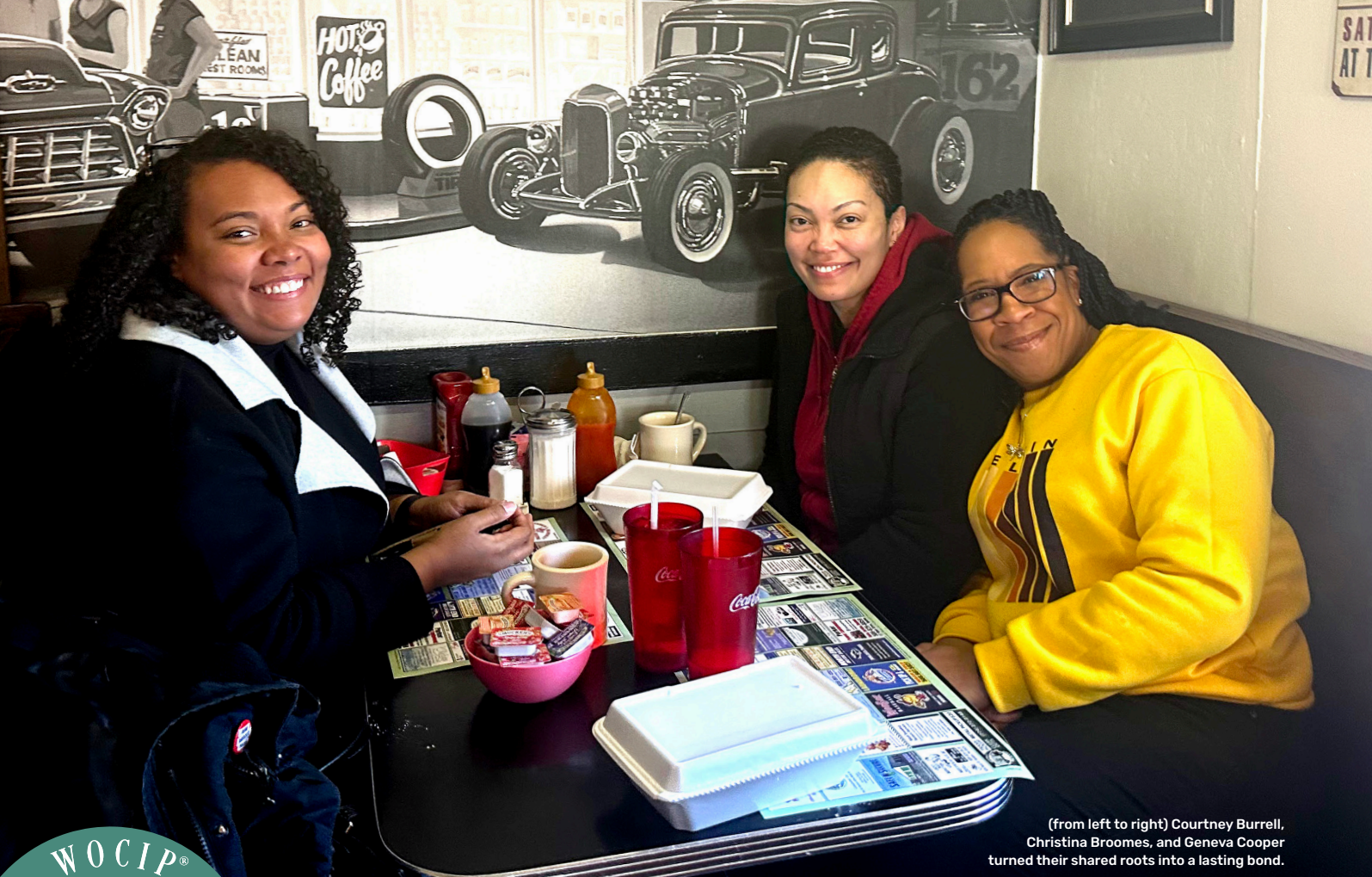
### A Vision for the Future

Through WOCIP, Charlotte addresses Latinas' challenges while celebrating their achievements. Her vision for a fair, inclusive industry inspires hope and proves that real change is possible through intentional, collective effort. She champions fairness daily, focusing on the marginalization of Latinas in biopharma and building a community where these women find strength in their collective identity. "You are not alone," she asserts. ●

### HEAR CHARLOTTE IN HER OWN WORDS

Scan the QR Code to access the "In the Know" podcast interview of Dr. Charlotte Jones-Burton by WOCIP colleague Lorena Kuri.





(from left to right) Courtney Burrell, Christina Broomes, and Geneva Cooper turned their shared roots into a lasting bond.

We are *Sharing*  
*the power*

of the  
WOCIP  
message  
and network  
throughout  
the world!



OUR NEXT ISSUE  
*OF WE ARE PHARMA!*  
*ADVANCING EQUITY*  
FEATURES VOICES AND IDEAS  
FROM OUR WOCIP MEMBERS  
LEADING AROUND THE  
GLOBE. IS THAT YOU?  
IS THAT YOUR COLLEAGUE?

CONTACT US AT  
[INFO@WOCIP.ORG](mailto:INFO@WOCIP.ORG)  
TO SHARE YOUR STORY.



## One-in-a-Million Connections

**WOCIP has an extraordinary power to forge deep connections. Initially uniting women of color in life sciences seeking to be heard, seen, and empowered, the initiative has had a ripple effect far beyond its original scope.**

One powerful example showcases WOCIP's true impact. Members Geneva Cooper, Courtney Burrell, and Christina Broomes connected at the 2022 conference. Recognizing their shared Boston roots, they started a group chat that blossomed into a monthly brunch tradition.

United by a commitment to self-care, these brunches became a vital part of

their lives. They bonded over delicious food and the understanding of their unique needs. "It's a much-needed extension of WOCIP's support network," Geneva explains. "Being local, in the same industry, and women of color has allowed for tough but necessary conversations about allyship and advocacy."

Courtney echoes the sentiment: "These ladies are my sisters.

There is no question I can't ask, no topic we haven't covered. Often, there isn't anyone in our company or personal life who truly understands our unique joys and struggles. I know Christina and Geneva understand where I am coming from and challenge me to be greater."

The bonds forged within this sisterhood, and the broader WOCIP community, have

been transformative. "Connection and community have made my journey in pharma flourish," Courtney reflects. From navigating job changes to balancing motherhood, the shared experiences and insights have been invaluable.

Their story reflects WOCIP's vision: in an industry where women of color face unique challenges, sisterhood and community make all the difference.

# WOCIP<sup>®</sup>

ADVANCING  
**HEALTH EQUITY**

by empowering women of color in the life sciences industry to achieve positions of

**POWER & INFLUENCE**