Frank Silva: Welcome to Mi Camino, a series where we interview faculty and alumni on their path through education and beyond. Today, our guest is Gladys Ramos, a perinatologist with UC San Diego Health and professor in the Department of Obstetrics, Gynecology, and Reproductive Sciences. Dr. Ramos is adept at connecting with patients and students alike through her unique story, which she will share with us today. Thank you for being here today with us, Dr. Ramos.

Gladys (Sandy) Ramos: Thank you for the invite.

Frank Silva: I'm really glad that you were able to find some time. We know you're super busy. I think your story is going to be lovely and it'll resonate with a lot of people. I think it'll inspire young people to go to university and maybe even become physician like yourself. Maybe you could tell us a little bit about where you grew up and what was your family life like, and where is your family from?

Gladys (Sandy) Ramos: Yeah, so I was born in Lima, Peru to teenage parents, and we lived in this multi-level home with all of our family members. My grandmother was my primary caretaker initially. But Lima, at the time, was undergoing some very difficult times politically, and my parents, as teenage parents, found themselves with really not many options with regards to their futures in trying to raise their two daughters so they decided to immigrate to the United States.

Gladys (Sandy) Ramos: My dad immigrated two years earlier than we did, and then we joined them in 1980. They felt very strongly that by immigrating to the United States, they would be able to provide for their daughters, for their family, and actually for their whole family because eventually our whole family ended up immigrating, extended family. But they really believed in the educational opportunities that the United States would be able to provide for their daughters, and so that was really ingrained in my upbringing.

Frank Silva: Yeah. It's the same immigrant story that we hear all the time, the United States and other countries just provide opportunities for people who have to leave their homes because of what's happening over there.

Gladys (Sandy) Ramos: Yeah, definitely.

Frank Silva: We're really glad that your father made that decision because now we have you, this brilliant physician here working for us at UC San Diego. Tell your father, thank you for me.

Gladys (Sandy) Ramos: I will.

Frank Silva: Let's talk a little bit more about your grandmother, because I recall you mentioning that she was one of your inspirations for going into health and for being a physician. Say a little bit more about that.

Gladys (Sandy) Ramos: Yeah, because we lived in this home with all of our family members, and literally people would just show up like cousins from other family members, we had a large extended family. My grandmother was a caretaker, and so she would take care of everybody's not only food needs, but also health needs. If anybody had a stomachache or a headache, she was there to provide her skills.

Gladys (Sandy) Ramos: I thought of her as a curandera really when I was growing up because I just saw her being responsible for taking care of the ailments of family members. I really I would follow her everywhere. I really responded to that. I also found her so nurturing and caring and supportive. That really resonated with me in terms of wanting to be a healer, because I would see her that way as a healer within our family.

Frank Silva: Yeah. A very similar thing. My grandmother, I saw her as a curandera. I asked my mom, I was like, was grandma curandera? She goes, no. I go, well, what about the egg and the herbs and the.

Gladys (Sandy) Ramos: Yeah, exactly.

Frank Silva: She goes, no. But yeah, so it's lovely that that tradition sparked your interest in being a healer yourself, and a modern healer. So you're a perinatologist. Just tell us a little bit more about that. What is a perinatologist?

Gladys (Sandy) Ramos: Yeah, I didn't really know what that was when I embarked on my career in medicine. But when I landed in obstetrics and found my niche, I particularly was drawn to the obstetrics part. And I always found throughout my journey in medicine that I liked medical complications. So a perinatologist is an obstetrician that did extra training three more years to learn some of these medical complications in the management in pregnancy. Also about the fetus. And so we are experts in fetal diagnosis and fetal management as well as maternal management. So we take care of the most complicated pregnancies, whether it be because of a maternal cause or a fetal cause.

Frank Silva: And maybe you could share a little bit more about how you're working with the community here at UC San Diego. And I think you specialize in diabetes.

Gladys (Sandy) Ramos: Yeah, that is correct. I really was drawn to UC San Diego in particular because I realized early in my residency training that I wanted to care for people that were like me, immigrants, Spanish speakers, folks from different backgrounds. I wanted to leverage that, the fact that I am bilingual. I realized that diabetes really did adversely impact our communities and so I wanted to serve that community, and the best way to do it was through taking care of women with diabetes.

Gladys (Sandy) Ramos: At UC San Diego, when I first came as an observer during residency, I noted that they had an amazing diabetes program in the day run by doctor Mohr, who became my mentor through my journey of my career as a perinatologist. But we worked primarily with Spanish speakers so 80% of our patients were Latina. I was able to use my language, my cultural knowledge. Even though I'm from South America, I had many Mexican and Central American friends.

Gladys (Sandy) Ramos: I was able to really discuss a lot of dietary nutrition guidance with my patients. Also a lot of beliefs that are deep-seated in our community about management of diabetes, a lot of fears. I was able to leverage that to really provide the best care that I could in pregnancy, and I still do to this day, and it's my favorite thing is to be able to work with these patients to get them to have the safest pregnancies and the healthiest babies.

Frank Silva: I imagine it's very comforting for the patient to have a provider who understands their language, can speak their language, understands their culture.

Gladys (Sandy) Ramos: I hope so. I believe it is.

Frank Silva: Yeah, I think it is too.

Gladys (Sandy) Ramos: I've had many patients that have come back over and over for their care in our clinic, and we really do want to provide that very important cultural background to the care that we provide for our patients.

Frank Silva: Yeah, that's how UC San Diego is able to provide patient-centered care, like in partnership with the patient and their own health beliefs and so, that sounds amazing. You mentioned your journey to become a perinatologist. Maybe you could share a little bit more about what your undergraduate experience was like, what medical school was like.

Gladys (Sandy) Ramos: Yeah. It's funny that you brought up my dad when we were talking earlier because when I applied for undergrad, I applied everywhere. But they pulled me from my high school

into, like, counseling session about college, and initially, they told me I was aiming too high and that I should be a nurse. And I said, no, I want to be a physician.

Frank Silva: Good for you.

Gladys (Sandy) Ramos: My father had wanted to be a physician, having my grandmother as what I called a healer. I felt like that was my journey. But Pepperdine came and actually spoke to us, to a select few of students, which is also frustrating to me to think back on that I was handpicked as opposed to this opportunity given to other students. But regardless, I went to Pepperdine, and my dad came with me, and they asked him to come and tour the campus.

Gladys (Sandy) Ramos: It's a Christian university, so he was sold, given our cultural background. But here he was in his work clothes and with me touring the university. We were very happy to, they gave me a lot of scholarships. I'm very thankful for the opportunities Pepperdine University gave me, but it was a hard transition. I went from inner-city LA and Highland Park, at the time, was very much still northeast LA to Malibu, where there was a lot of wealth.

Gladys (Sandy) Ramos: I was one of a few dozen undergraduate students of color, and the socioeconomic difference was very stark. It was very much a cultural change when I got there, and my grades suffered the first two years. But then through the support of my professors and folks that believed in me, I was able to flourish. But I have to say my GPA in sciences was not as great as I would have wanted it. But I had many people that believed in me at the university, despite the fact that I was shy.

Gladys (Sandy) Ramos: I was the only one of color in many of my science classes, and our science classes were small. I felt a little bit like an outsider. It was something I had to build upon and to build the confidence, the study skills that I needed, despite having done well in high school, to do well in the university.

Frank Silva: Yeah, and that's not an uncommon story. Thank you for sharing it because it will really normalize, I think, the experiences that some of our current scholars have when they come to an R1, like UC San Diego. They're valectorian at their school, but there's, like, 100 or 1,000 other valectorian that UC San Diego, so it changes the playground a little bit. Then our students that are first generation, they just don't know what they don't know.

Frank Silva: I'm glad to hear that you found mentors and that you were able to develop your identity as a scholar and as a member of the academy and see yourself as that because that's what it takes to transition into postbaccalaureate studies. Maybe you could share a little bit more about med school and how it was that you got into med school and what that experience was.

Gladys (Sandy) Ramos: Yeah, so I applied right out of college. I took the MCAT and didn't do so well as I would have wanted. That combined with my GPA really prohibited me from getting into med school. I actually had to do a lot of soul searching at that point because there is a lot of self-doubt that creeps in. I thought I could hear that guidance counselor saying, maybe you should be a nurse situation. But I did research with my mentors, they put me in touch with the NIH, so I was able to go there and work in the clinical arm for looking at HIV complications.

Gladys (Sandy) Ramos: That was really pivotal, I believe, because it helped to build my confidence. Second of all, I did do an EMT class thinking maybe I should pivot, and I realized very quickly, that's not what I wanted. I wanted to be in charge. I didn't want to be somebody who just played an important role, but dropped off our patient. I wanted to see what was going on later and how to take care of that patient.

Gladys (Sandy) Ramos: I worked really hard and then was working in a science lab trying to build my

science background and skills. Then I came upon a post op program at UC Irvine and so I enrolled. It was aimed for underrepresented minorities in medicine. I did the program, and it was really pivotal. I met other students like me, which was super important because I was isolated. My parents didn't know how to help me get into med school. They didn't have the knowledge base.

Gladys (Sandy) Ramos: I had taken the MCAT in this journey and still not done well enough so I was very frustrated and they had an MCAT prep course. I again, studied my butt off. I don't feel like anything really changed except I got the confidence and I had the support that I needed with folks who shared a very similar goal, and then I ended up doing really well in the MCAT.

Gladys (Sandy) Ramos: Then I took undergraduate upper-level electives in science at UCI as part of the post-bac. I got straight As even though I was working full time. I think I just had learned how to study. I had support from my peers. My confidence level had gone back up, and with my research skills and my higher MCAT, I was able to apply to med school, and I gained admission. That was incredible. I got into UCI and Howard University. But financially, it made more sense for me to go to UC Irvine. I was able to get into med school.

Frank Silva: Post-boc programs exist throughout the entire United States. UC San Diego as a post-boc program, and they're excellent opportunities, and I'm glad you shared it because I want these young scholars to know that this type of program exists. Really, that's what it is. It's just like everything comes together because the folks who get into UCI or UC Riverside, they belong there but they don't feel like they do, and that little bad voice, they call it the impostor syndrome and all these things, like, they're real. They exist.

Frank Silva: You're a living example of how with perseverance and the right mentors, you can realize your dreams. I'm again really excited that you're here, and you remind me of a woman who I've always held dear to my heart. Her name is Dr. Sandra Daley, and she ran UC San Diego's post-bacc program for many years. She would always say to the young scholars, like, you belong. You're going to be a brilliant physician. We're just going to help you get there.

Gladys (Sandy) Ramos: Exactly.

Frank Silva: That's all folks really need. How did you find yourself better understanding, like, how do you want to specialize in perinatology?

Gladys (Sandy) Ramos: Yeah. Once you get into med school, and I always tell students this as well. Once you get into med school, there's a lot of support. They really believe that you should be there, and it's really hard to "fail" from med school because you're just with other peers and tutors and everything else. Take advantage of all of those services. But once I started clinical, I loved everything about my clinical rotations.

Gladys (Sandy) Ramos: I really didn't think I was going to do OB. I initially thought I would do family medicine because I looked up to my family medicine physician, and I wanted to take care of my community. I felt like I wanted to take care of everybody, men, women, and children. But everything I liked, but nothing was driving a passion until I hit the labor and delivery floor.

Gladys (Sandy) Ramos: My first delivery was actually with a young teenage Latina mom. That really, like I don't know. I think I probably saw my mother in that young woman. I saw friends, peers. It was something that just struck a chord with me. Being there with her, it was just like the thing that clenched my decision. I realized this is what I'm passionate about. I never would have thought that I would only take care of not only, but that I would specialize in 50% of the population. But it really resonated with me, and I never looked back after that decision.

Frank Silva: Yeah. It sparked your passion.

Gladys (Sandy) Ramos: It did.

Frank Silva: Yeah. It just all came together like a puzzle piece fell into place.

Gladys (Sandy) Ramos: Yeah, exactly.

Frank Silva: That's awesome.

Gladys (Sandy) Ramos: It was like an aha moment for me at that point. Yeah.

Frank Silva: Yeah. Maybe you could say a little bit more about how you use your background, your lived experience to connect both with patients and with students.

Gladys (Sandy) Ramos: Yeah. I give a lot of talks to students about perseverance and imposter syndrome because now we have a name for it. The importance of having your community and peers that are going through the same shared lived experience, that's really important. For my patients, I think it's really important for them to know a little bit of my background.

Gladys (Sandy) Ramos: When I drop little hints here and there, it just makes them laugh when I'm like, OK you're allowed to gain this much weight based on your medical history. Don't let your Tias or your Abuelas tell you you have to eat for two. Your [inaudible 00:16:21] is telling you this, things like that, and they laugh at me or like, certain things that we share in common foods. We just have a good laugh in clinic, and I think that helps to make them trust me more and to realize, I know what I'm talking about, their background. I try to understand them.

Gladys (Sandy) Ramos: When they have multiple issues that are, and many times the women in our culture do. They're their primary caretakers. They're the breadwinners, but they also need to take care of the house and maybe, also take care of other family members. There's so many responsibilities on their shoulders. I understand that and having to prioritize a pregnancy amongst all of the other things they need to is very challenging and so I try to meet them where they're at. We have a lot of discussions about this. We call it social determinants of health, but this is a reality we've all faced for a long time. And I think now we have, again, a term to discuss this and to help them with their care as much as we can.

Gladys (Sandy) Ramos: We talk in clinic a lot about meeting our patients where they're at, and what their goals are for care because we have our own goals, but that might not be possible for the patient at that point in time.

Frank Silva: Yeah. And maybe you could talk a little bit more. I think you're the director of this special program. Maybe share a little bit more about it is, what is it called.

Gladys (Sandy) Ramos: We have the diabetes and pregnancy program here at UC San Diego. We're unique in that the perinatologists, like myself, run the diabetes management of people with over diabetes or gestational diabetes in other programs they may share with an endocrinologist. But here it's a one-stop shop so they get both for diabetes care and their obstetric care in one place.

Gladys (Sandy) Ramos: We have social workers. We have a nutritionist who speaks Spanish, excuse me, certified diabetic educators. We have about six of them that work with our patients. All it's aimed at is really, like, trying to provide that support and care for our patients. Our patients come to clinic, see us, see all the different specialties if they need to. Then we manage their care all the way through postpartum.

Frank Silva: That's awesome. It makes it a lot easier for the patients to because they just go to the same place to see whoever it is.

Gladys (Sandy) Ramos: Exactly.

Frank Silva: That's great. Maybe as we wrap up, what advice would you have to any young scholars who are listening or watching this particular video?

Gladys (Sandy) Ramos: Number 1 is find your people. I think that's really, really important to have the support. Find students that are hopefully of similar backgrounds. Sometimes they don't have to be. They just have to be there to support your journey. Number 2, the first two years of undergrad are super important. I tell students this, learn how to study, use office hours, get your grades up as high as you can.

Gladys (Sandy) Ramos: Once you have that down, then you can start doing extracurriculars, because many times students they tell me they need this many clinical hours, this much research, this much volunteer work, and I'm like, no, let's focus on the core of academics first, and then we can talk about the rest. We have some wonderful programs here at UC San Diego, including the PATHS program that helps pair up undergrads with folks like myself to help them in their journey. A lot of times, all I do is really offer a sounding board for them as they make decisions with regards to their education.

Gladys (Sandy) Ramos: Those are the things that I would say, early on are important. Then, you know, during med school, it's just relying on your peers, again, relying on the resources that they offer you. But a lot of medical students will tell you this. It's hard. I'm not going to sugarcoat it, but it's also a great time. I made some wonderful friends during my med school journey.

Frank Silva: Lovely. Well, thank you so much for being with us today.

Gladys (Sandy) Ramos: Thank you for having me.