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As Seen in...

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Beyond Medicine

Dr. John Zavaleta OB/GYN

Keys to a Successful Medical Practice:

- Communication
- Listening Skills
- A Business Plan
- A Passion

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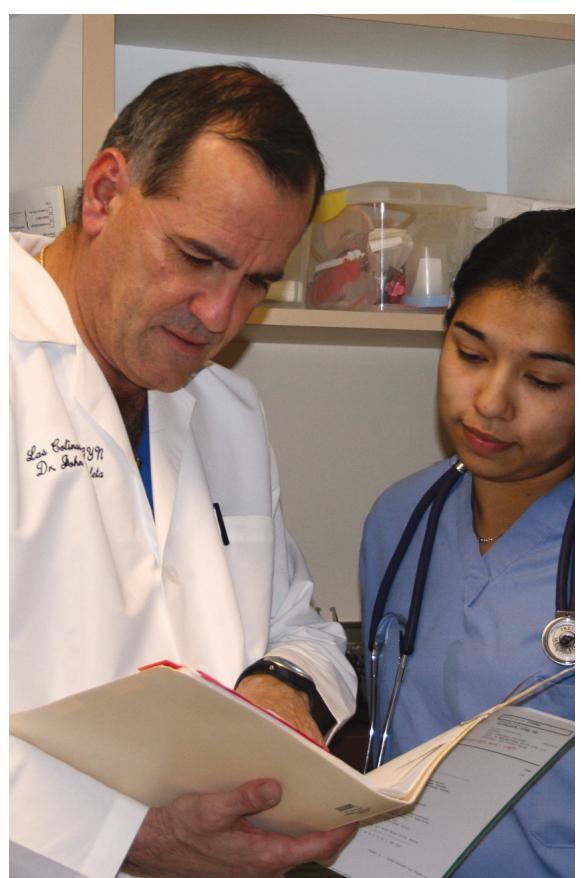


The Art & Business of Private Practice

At the age of 19, John Zavaleta left Brownsville, Texas to embark on a journey he still enjoys today: a passion for providing women with the finest healthcare available.

Dr. Zavaleta graduated from the University of Texas Southwestern Medical School in 1981, and then did his residency at Baylor Medical Center in Dallas specializing in Obstetrics and Gynecology. Although originally educated at University of Texas as a pharmacist, he was interested in doing more to share his passion of helping others. As he developed his career as a physician, Dr. Zavaleta acknowledges how his training as a pharmacist aided him: "The time I spent as a pharmacist provided me with an edge to better counsel my patients on the medicines they were taking. As a result of my time in that field, I have a better understanding of the large array of pharmaceuticals that physicians have at their disposal, and my patients appreciate the expertise I share with them."

Dr. Zavaleta made the switch to Obstetrics & Gynecology from a desire to work in the field of women's health, which allowed him to expand into different disciplines. "I really loved the idea of being able to bring new life into this world and every day I get to share that joy with my patients." I also enjoy working with women in part because they take much better care of their health than men, and because they have special needs which require a certain amount of skill," says Dr. Zavaleta.



Dr. John Zavaleta in his Las Colinas office

Dr. Zavaleta's practice has expanded beyond just OBGYN over the years...providing his patients with a holistic approach to maintaining optimum health.

Dr. Zavaleta's practice has always been distinguished by his concern for his patients and the personal care he provides them. When a patient urgently needs to be seen, she can come to his office at any time and Dr. Zavaleta or his staff will fit her immediately into their busy schedule. "I think my patients understand I truly care about them, and as a result I have developed many long-term relationships with them over the years. Because of the personal connection, I feel a special responsibility to provide my patients only the best care available. I not only get to know the women who come to see me, but their entire families, including their children."

When Dr. Zavaleta came to Irving to start his practice in 1985, he found a tremendous void in the area of Spanish-speaking OBGYNs. He was amazed to find that he was the only Hispanic OBGYN in all of Irving. "Overcoming the language barrier is such an important issue when trying to communicate about health concerns," says Dr. Zavaleta. "I'm delighted to be able to provide the Hispanic community of Irving with a staff that can understand what they need and who can answer their questions clearly." This level of higher communication has created a very devoted patient base that come from all over the Metroplex, often driving long distances to come to his office. "I have seen the problems that a lack of proper verbal communication can create for women, and it's very fulfilling to help them," says Dr. Zavaleta. He counts his ability to effectively serve the Hispanic community of DFW as the achievement he is most proud of professionally.

Dr. Zavaleta's practice has expanded beyond just ObGyn over the years, as he has added services and procedures to better meet the demand of his patients. These include: offering alternatives to hysterectomies, providing a cutting edge non-surgical solution to permanent birth control, recommending proper nutrition to aid with weight management, sleep disorders and libido issues. Dr. Zavaleta is providing his patients with a holistic approach to maintaining optimum health.

Dr. Zavaleta actively seeks out opportunities to expand his base of knowledge on new programs and procedures, attending several seminars and training sessions each year. Dr. Zavaleta is the first physician in the DFW Metroplex to use the Essure device as an alternative to surgery for women seeking permanent birth control. An example of the progressive nature of his practice, this procedure, approved by the FDA in late 2002, has had a 100% success rate in the tests done in clinical trials (the manufacturer, Conceptus Inc., acknowledges that no contraception device is 100% effective and that there is always a small chance of pregnancy). Dr. Zavaleta was interested in this procedure because it offered his patients an alternative birth control method requiring no incisions, cutting, or burning of the fallopian tubes and does not require general anesthesia. The device does not contain or release any hormones--it works by blocking the fallopian tubes and causing scar tissue to form, preventing fertilization. Women are typically discharged from the medical facility 45 minutes after the procedure and return to normal activities within 24 hours.

Other office procedures offered at Las Colinas ObGyn include endometrial ablation, a procedure to reduce and/or cure abnormal uterine bleeding. This technology offers a treatment that is quick, simple, safe and requires no endometrial pre-treatment. There are no incisions and takes only a few minutes significantly less time than other ablation procedures. It is covered by most insurance and usually only your office co-pay is all that's required. You will feel no discomfort. In fact 95% of patients undergoing this technique would recommend it to a friend. There are no hormones involved. The tissue that forms the lining of the uterus which is shed during your period is destroyed. This exciting new office procedure is done under mild sedation administered by board certified anesthesiologists.

Dr. Zavaleta is encouraged by the rising trend in prenatal health among his patients. "A large percentage of my patients are more educated on their own health and fetal health during pregnancy. This has contributed to better eating habits, taking supplements during pregnancy, exercise and avoiding activities that might damage the fetus, like drinking alcohol, smoking and taking drugs," says Dr. Zavaleta. "This development might not be evident in public facilities, but I think it is a common trend in private practice." Dr. Zavaleta attributes the education of his patients to better medical care and access to the Internet. "More women have immediate

access to better information that is now easily obtained. I frequently have patients coming in and asking me about alternatives to conventional treatments and medications which they've learned about online."



Dr. Zavaleta in consultation with patient

Dr. Zavaleta's outlook for the future of the medical community is very positive, but he does express concerns over insurance issues and the increase in the numbers of lawsuits against doctors. "The challenge that physicians face is providing necessary procedures while obtaining the cooperation of the insurance companies, and that can be difficult," says Dr. Zavaleta. "The ability for women to have access to proper healthcare in many states is in jeopardy and the physician's ability to practice medicine is impacted by the constant threat of legal action. Our society is becoming more and more litigious." Dr. Zavaleta feels that practicing medicine is his lifelong mission and is passionate about staying at the cutting edge of his field, despite these obstacles.



The Las Colinas ObGyn Office

Dr. Zavaleta understands that it will be up to the government and courts to resolve these complicated and difficult issues, but believes there are steps physicians can take to weather the storm. First and foremost, he recommends physicians' review their business practices and make sure they're running the most economical practice possible – this includes hiring employees that are capable of multi-tasking to keep overhead low. He also suggests doctors make sure their accounts receivable are being handled in a diligent manner, to ensure the practice collects what is due. Finally, offering products that complement the services provided can add to the bottom line of the practice and provide patients with solutions to their needs. "My advice to physicians coming out of residency today is to find a physician-mentor that can help you learn the business and art of medicine. For the most part, our education and period of residency focuses on the science of medicine," states Zavaleta. "Spending a few years working within the confines of a successful practice can be invaluable experience." As a mentor himself, he advises other doctors to have a good business plan and surround themselves with experts in their fields, and to always remember to have patience with their staff and show their appreciation on a daily basis. "I personally greet and speak with everyone in my office each day as part of my routine," says Zavaleta. "Giving credit on a regular basis for a job well done boosts office morale, and creates a more stable staff with less turnover."

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Dr. Zavaleta's personal approach with his staff has been instrumental to the longevity of his practice, but when asked to what he attributes his success, Zavaleta replies, "It's the ability to listen to my patients. By the time they leave my office I want to have fulfilled their expectations." That may seem like a common-sense approach, but Zavaleta states he's amazed by the number of new patients that come to him who haven't been able to get their needs met. "Part of our job as physicians is to help our patients express what their real concerns are, and sometimes that is very difficult for them to do," says Zavaleta. "We have to be well versed at asking questions and prompting patients to tell us what problems they are experiencing."

In his free time, Dr. Zavaleta enjoys water sports, and his leisure time usually finds him boating at area lakes. He also enjoys local theater. "There is nothing like watching a good production, locally-produced and featuring actors who are part of the community," says Dr. Zavaleta, himself an active member of the community.