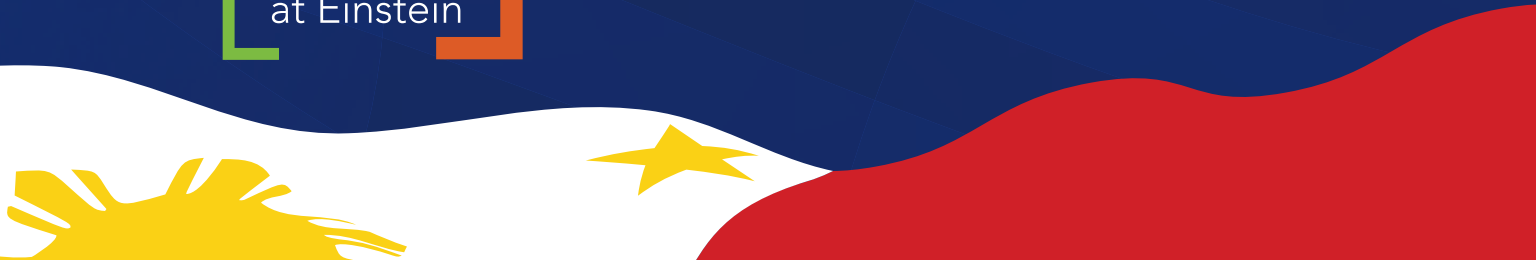




FILIPINO AMERICAN HISTORY MONTH

In marking Filipino American History Month, the office of diversity and inclusion sat down with Drs. Michael Cabana and Mutya San Agustin to learn about the professional journeys of these two outstanding Einstein community members of Filipinx descent.





Michael Cabana, M.D., M.P.H.



MICHAEL D. CABANA, M.D., M.P.H.

M.D. university chair, professor, pediatrics

Dr. Cabana recalls one of his earliest memories in the resident housing complex where he lived as a young boy: “I remember watching from the playground and seeing all the doctors in their white coats going to the hospital.” He is the son of two Filipinx pediatricians, Drs. Emilio Cabana and Erlinda Cabana, who moved to the United States in 1964 after earning their medical degrees at the University of Santo Tomas, in the Philippines the previous year. The couple eventually traveled to Chicago, where they completed their respective residencies at Rush-Presbyterian-St. Luke Hospital and Michael Reese Hospital. Dr. Cabana was born at that time and spent his formative years in a resident housing community that was diverse and global. “I remember hearing different languages and different accents,” he said.

Although Dr. Cabana’s parents had initially planned on returning to the Philippines following their residencies, the political climate in their homeland and the opportunities available for their children in the United States led them to stay. This was not uncommon at the time. The 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act promoted the immigration of skilled workers and professionals from non-European countries, including doctors, as there were forecasts of national doctor and nursing shortages in the U.S.. As a result, between 1963 and 1979, the United States accepted over 60,000 international medical graduates. Newly minted M.D.s from the Philippines were particularly well-positioned to secure post-graduate training positions; due to the American colonization of the Philippines (1898-1946), the medical education system there was modeled after America’s and based in English.

The Cabana family moved to a town near Chicago where Dr. Cabana and his three brothers grew up and his father established a pediatric practice. Although there were only a few Filipinx households in town, there were some others who worked in medicine, which provided a sense of community. In addition, there was a social and professional network of Filipinx medical professionals in the broader Chicago area and throughout the United States, which the Cabanas actively engaged in. Two of Dr. Cabana’s brothers pursued careers in pediatrics—one practices general pediatrics in the same practice established by Dr. Cabana’s father and the other practices pediatric dentistry in the same office building in Downers Grove, IL.



Dr. Michael Cabana and his mother,
Dr. Erlinda Cabana.


Dr. Cabana earned his M.D. and M.B.A. in the Combined Degree Program at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine and the Wharton School of Business and completed his residency at Johns Hopkins. While working in San Francisco at the UCSF Benioff Children's Hospital and Zuckerberg San Francisco General Hospital, he had firsthand experiences of the impact of his own background on clinical care and the importance of diversity.

The San Francisco Bay Area has a large Filipino community and Dr. Cabana cared for a significant number of patients of Filipino descent in the clinic. He noticed that sharing a common heritage allowed him to better connect and communicate with his patients. Knowing that these strong relationships

result in better care, Dr. Cabana stresses that physicians "need to be able to communicate with patients in a way that they understand."

Dr. Cabana believes in the importance of diverse mentorship to build an equitable workforce of healthcare professionals. Mentorship is also personally important to him today because his mentors made a big difference in his medical education journey. In his role as chair of pediatrics at Einstein and Montefiore, he's involved in helping young people from groups who are underrepresented in medicine explore the medical world. He has spoken with pre-med students in the [Bronx HOPE program](#) at Einstein, sharing his journey and encouraging them to pursue a career in medicine or medical research. He's been able to recruit and retain diverse faculty members to his department. "If you create an environment that celebrates and values diversity, trainees will notice that. In turn, it also helps attract a diverse pool of candidates, including many who may be your former trainees," he explained.

Dr. Cabana carries out his passion for diversity and inclusion in other ways as well. He is part of the Academic Pediatric Association's New Century Scholars Resident Mentoring Program, which aims to increase the diversity of the academic pediatric workforce. He is also a member of the Council of Young Filipino Americans in Medicine, which promotes



the leadership development of young Filipinx American physicians and trainees, reinforces the educational pipeline, and addresses structural inequities in health through Filipinx-American advocacy, scholarship, and community partnership. When asked what he would say to young Filipinx Americans interested in a career in medicine, Dr. Cabana responded, “Filipinx Americans are one of the fastest-growing groups in the United States. While assimilation may be easy for many Filipinx Americans, it’s important to remember your culture. We need healthcare providers from all backgrounds so come and pursue a career in medicine.”



Mutya San Agustin, M.D., F.A.A.P.



MUYTA SAN AGUSTIN, M.D., F.A.A.P.

Retired

Dr. Cabana first became familiar with the work of Dr. Mutya San Agustin, a Filipino physician who had created a pipeline program for physicians of Filipinx descent to pursue their medical careers at Albert Einstein College of Medicine, when he was chief of general pediatrics at the University of California, San Francisco. Although he didn't arrive at Einstein through that pipeline, Dr. Cabana eventually joined the Einstein faculty as chair of pediatrics in part due to her work.

Dr. San Agustin has been an extraordinarily influential leader and pioneer in the Filipinx American medical community. "She has been a beacon for so many," explained Dr. Cabana. "As Filipino American, it is an honor to be a member of the department where she spent so much of her career. Einstein and Montefiore have an incredible reputation in the Philippines because this is where many leading pediatric educators received their training as a result of her recruitment efforts." Dr. Mutya San Agustin made it her mission to recruit young Filipino Americans, as well as other international students, into American medical schools. While at Einstein, she established an international fellowship program and worked closely with the dean's office to ensure foreign students were well represented in the medical school.

Dr. San Agustin was an international student herself. She grew up in the Philippines, the youngest of seven children. Her older brother was a physician and he inspired her to pursue a career in the field. She graduated from the University of the Philippines in 1957 and traveled to the United States at the age of 22 to complete her residency at Sinai Hospital in Baltimore, where she served as chief resident.

During her time in Maryland, Dr. San Agustin felt the blatant racism and sexism of the era. At John Hopkins, where she rotated as a resident, there were separate dining halls for people of color and white people. Around Baltimore, she noticed signs in restaurants, movie theaters, and other businesses that read "off limits to Jews." Segregation was the social norm, which she found difficult to comprehend.

An attending physician once asked her if she had grown up in a tree because she was from the Philippines. Her boss told her that her salary would be one-third less than her male colleagues because men had to be the "breadwinners of the home" and



Faculty 1966-1967

First Row: J. Kochen, I. Greifer, C. Edelman, Jr., H.L. Barnett, L.M. Fraad, E. Sobel, L. Gartner, E. Scarpelli


Second Row: L. Katkin, S. London, E. Paulsen, J. David, P. Patel, M. Santorineau, M. San Agustin, L. Hsu, F.M. Krampf, F. Ginsberg

Third Row: P. Shrock, E. Silis, M. Abramowicz, H. Cohen, B. Shaywitz, I. Houston, E. Moore, R. Kravath, E. Agasso, A. Gruskin, J. Soriano

men needed more money to take women on dates. Frustrated and determined, Dr. San Agustin joined a group of female pediatricians who brought a lawsuit against the institution for equal pay. It was an uphill battle, but eventually they won. "You have to fight back," she said.

Dr. San Agustin went on to become a professor of pediatrics, of clinical epidemiology, and of family and social medicine at Einstein, where she established the primary care residency program in pediatrics and internal medicine at Montefiore Medical Center and North Central Bronx Hospital. She is internationally renowned for her work integrating medical education and physician training into primary care in the U.S. As a medical educator, she advocated for diversity in medicine and the need for students to address their own bias when caring for patients.

She also reached outside the hospital walls to care for and mentor those in the community. She established a program that helped teen mothers in the South Bronx earn their GED and as director of the department of ambulatory medicine at North Central Bronx Hospital, an affiliate of Montefiore, she started a program in which students from DeWitt Clinton High School in the Bronx shadowed physicians. Many years after the program began, a Black military officer and physician arrived at her office, asking to speak



to her. He explained that he was an alumni of the shadowing program, gave her a hug, and told her that she was the reason he was in his position. She turned to him and told him, “No, you are the reason you’re in that position. You did the work to get there.”

Dr. San Agustin is also known for founding the Philippine Ambulatory Pediatric Association, which she led for 21 years. She has received numerous awards from local, national, and international health organizations, including the Bela Schick Award and the Altran Foundation Scholarship Award from Einstein, the Maternal and Child Health Services Award from the U.S. Department of Health, the Community Leadership Award from the Bronx Community Health Network, Inc., and the Centennial Award as a Builder of Medicine by the University of the Philippines College of Medicine.

“My journey wasn’t always easy because I am a woman, a foreigner, and I’m short,” Dr. Agustin said with a smile. Some of her colleagues even referred to her as “dragon lady.” However, she was not deterred in her career choice or from pursuing her goals. “I’m a fighter, which is why I got to the top of the food chain. I always stand up for what I believe in,” she explained. She attributes her success to receiving a good education and strong mentor support. Her message to underrepresented minorities in medicine is to “cultivate what you know best, believe in it, and don’t compromise. You can make it happen.”

Read a chapter from the book *“Disrupt” Filipina Women: Daring to Lead.*

[Click here.](#)

Edited by Maria Africa Beebe

Published by: Filipina Women’s Network, San Francisco, CA 94119 USA