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Pioneer in neurosurgery [1]

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By Marga Parés Arroyo / end.mpares@elnuevodia.com [2] endi.com [3] Breaking stereotypes, two months ago, young doctor Maria Mercedes Toledo González became the first Puerto Rican woman graduating as a neurosurgeon from University of Puerto Rico Medical School (UPR-MSC) But that is not enough for her. After 14 years of study, Toledo González initiates the first of two years of additional formation that will turn her into the first Puerto Rican female endovascular neurosurgeon, a subspecialty practiced in the island only by doctor Rafael Rodriguez Mercado. He directs the Neuroendovascular Surgery program of Puerto Rico and the Caribbean located in Centro Medico. Under his mentorship Toledo González, 31 years-old, will form in this novel specialty that at the moment is practiced, world-wide by about 600 physicians. In Latin America, there are only three surgeons in this specialty and, if Toledo González completes her training satisfactorily, Puerto Rico will have two of them. Although everything would seem to indicate that since she was young, this alum of the Perpetuo Socorro Academy, Toledo González dreamed to be a neurosurgeon, Toledo González thought, initially, to follow her grandmother steps and study psychiatry. It was during her years of college in the UPR in Cayey that she fell in love with neuroscience. “I thought that I could do much more as a neurosurgeon”, the youthful doctor commented. During a recent routine procedure, to which two El Nuevo Dia journalists were invited, Toledo González demonstrated the passion she feels for er career. Dressed from head to toe in the typical sterile clothing that surgeons use, Toledo González looks experienced while she is assisted by Juan Carlos Puente, a Colombian doctor who is in his second year of training in this specialty. Both are supervised by Rodriguez Mercado. They are accompanied by radiological technologists Fernando Montero and Edwin Cruz, anesthesiologist Julio Soto, and nurses Jose Aponte and Blanca Girona. Their intention was to embolize an aneurism or abnormal protuberance in the wall of an artery. Embolizing is to introduce a catheter via the femoral artery through the ingle that allows the introduction of fine wires that fill up the aneurism and cut the blood flow. This avoids the aneurism to burst and cause a cerebral hemorrhage that can cause death or permanent neurological damage. Nevertheless, a series of radiological images demonstrate that the 61 year-old patient, who arrived with a cerebral aneurism, presents a series of additional complications. Due to the complexity of the case, they must consult it first with the

patient, whom El Nuevo Dia does not identify to protect its privacy, and obtain a signed consent. While she takes a brief rest before continuing with the second case of the day, Toledo González shows their commitment to help to diminish the incidence of brain strokes, the third cause of death in the country. “Eating a lot of “fast foods”, smoking, drinking, stress, a sedentary life, obesity, hypertension and diabetes are risk factors that can be avoided”, she said. Doctor Rodriguez Mercado overflows with pride for his pupil. “She has demonstrated a genuine interest. I hope that her motivation never dies”, said the physician, who thanked the Medical Foundation of Puerto Rico, the Mercedes Ruby Foundation and Johnson & Johnson, for their contribution to the commitment of remunerating with a monthly wage the first Puerto Rican that trained in center, distinction that fell on doctor Toledo. Once Toledo González finishes her subspecialty, she will fill the holes left last year when Rodriguez Mercado was activated by the United States Army during four months. During that time, eleven patients with cerebrovascular conditions passed away because no one could take care of them in the island, while other two had to be transferred to the United States. “For that reason is that I stay in Puerto Rico, I want to help”, said Toledo González, before returning to the operating room.

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