



Outstanding Young Alumna

Caitlin Bernard, MD '10

Caitlin Bernard, MD '10, is associate professor of clinical obstetrics and gynecology at Indiana University School of Medicine and director for the Division of Complex Family Planning. A nationally recognized advocate for reproductive rights, Dr. Bernard has become one of the most prominent voices defending reproductive healthcare access in post-Roe America while continuing to provide life-saving care to patients across the Midwest.

Bernard gained national attention in 2022 when she provided abortion care to a 10-year-old rape survivor from Ohio, speaking publicly about the case to illustrate the real-world impact of restrictive abortion laws. Despite facing intense scrutiny,

legal challenges, and personal threats, she has remained steadfast in her commitment to patient care and advocacy. Today, she is one of only two physicians still performing abortions in Indiana, where the procedure is legal only in cases of rape, incest, lethal fetal anomalies, or serious health risks.

Growing up in Binghamton, New York, Bernard knew from an early age that she wanted to pursue medicine. Her interest was solidified during high school through experiences in global health work. "It was impressed upon me that it's important to find something that can help you contribute to the world," she says. By the time she entered college at SUNY Binghamton, she had already decided to specialize in obstetrics and gynecology.

At Upstate Medical University, Bernard found crucial mentorship from Phil Ferro, MD '54, an OB-GYN who had been one of the first abortion providers in New York, even before *Roe v. Wade*. "He had an important historical perspective that allowed me to understand why this work was so important," Bernard recalls. She also worked with Peter J. Cronkright, MD, at migrant farm worker clinics, experiences that developed her strong sense of social justice and understanding of healthcare as a fundamental right.

After completing her residency at Upstate, Bernard spent a year in Kenya through Indiana University's AMPATH program, working in global

health before pursuing a fellowship in complex family planning at Washington University in St. Louis, where she also earned a Master of Science in Clinical Investigation. Her connection to Indiana University through the Kenya program ultimately led her to join the IU faculty, where she has worked to develop and expand complex family planning services throughout the state.

Bernard's clinical work encompasses the full spectrum of reproductive healthcare, from routine obstetrics to complex pregnancy complications and contraceptive care. She provides consultation services for patients with complex pregnancy and contraceptive needs, travels to Illinois to offer abortion care, and covers labor and delivery at Indianapolis hospitals. Her expertise has made her an essential resource for colleagues navigating the legal complexities of Indiana's restrictive abortion laws.

As a researcher, Bernard has secured more than \$3 million in grant funding and published extensively on contraceptive access, global reproductive health, and abortion care. Her work includes evaluating Indiana's statewide contraceptive access program PATH4YOU and conducting research on reproductive health needs among women living with HIV in Kenya through the AMPATH program.

Bernard's advocacy extends far beyond clinical care. She has provided expert testimony in legal



Bernard in front of the U.S. Supreme Court during a 2017 leadership training institute hosted by Physicians for Reproductive Health



Far left: Bernard giving blood in Kenya in 2015



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challenges to Indiana's abortion restrictions, served as co-legislative chair for the Indiana section of the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, and speaks nationally about reproductive justice. Her numerous awards include the ACLU of Indiana's Sig Beck Award for civil liberties advocacy, the American Medical Association Foundation's Courage in Women's Health Advocacy Award, and an honorary doctorate from Bard College.

Despite the personal and professional risks she faces, Bernard remains committed to her mission. "I really think back to Dr. Ferro at Upstate," she says. "He and others of his generation felt that they had to hide, that they couldn't be public about what they were doing, but

they knew that it was right. I really believed that we could have progress from his career to mine, and I don't intend to go back into the shadows."

In addition to her clinical and advocacy work, Bernard continues her involvement with global health initiatives in Kenya and maintains an active teaching role, mentoring medical students and residents while developing curriculum around contraception, abortion care, and reproductive justice. She manages the demands of her high-profile career while raising two young children with her supportive partner.

Bernard's approach to dealing with threats and challenges is characteristically direct: "I really try to ignore it as much as possible because I think it would be a disser-

vice to myself, to my mentors, and my colleagues if I was pushed into silence," she says.

When not working, Bernard practices yoga for stress management and enjoys traveling with her family to visit friends and relatives across the country. Her commitment to her patients and her profession remains unwavering: "There is something to be said for having a mission-aligned career that is much more than just a job, and I am very thankful for that," she says.

"I really cherish the time I was at Upstate," Bernard says. "The support that I received from my mentors and teachers allowed me to achieve what I planned to do, and I'm forever indebted to that foundation."