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First year of national AMWA Membership: 2025



Karina Vizzoni is a third-year medical student at Rowan-Virtua School of Medicine in New Jersey. Originally from northern New Jersey, she moved to Virginia for college, where she graduated magna cum laude with a degree in Biology from the College of William and Mary. Now at Rowan, Karina serves as the co-president of Giving A Boost Pre-Medical Mentoring program and vice president of Rowan's chapter of Association of Women Surgeons. In her free time, Karina enjoys cooking, music, and trying new foods. Karina aims to one day provide compassionate, patient-centered care.

## The Power in a Post-it Note

“Força.” It’s a word I wrote on a Post-it tucked into a recess in the bag I take to and from rotations everyday. It’s a Portuguese word, its English meaning translating to “strength.” My Post-it originated while I was studying for my first round of medical school board exams. I littered my wall with a rainbow of Post-it notes divulging mnemonics or facts to store in my memory. One Post-it note -the one saying “força”- made it to my bathroom mirror. “Força” was a reminder I faced everyday, a message to myself that I had the strength within to tackle the daunting task ahead. “Força” is a word gifted to me by the strength of the women in my own life. “Força” nurtured me, planted the seed of my being and watered it until it grew into who I am today.

I have been privileged to grow up and learn from strong women, namely those from my own Portuguese family. My grandmother, a single mother with two children, immigrated to a foreign country without money, language, or resources on her side. My mom, her daughter, moved away from all of her family and friends to pursue an education and become the first college graduate in her family-a degree she paid for herself by working day and night. My aunt ushered her husband through cancer and her daughter through his death, all while maintaining grace and stability for the sake of our family. “Força” is what I have grown up with, the expectation I have from the women who raised me, a word that shaped who I am.

Even in my most daunting times, “força” guided me, a promise to myself to believe in my own power. “Força” was the word I channeled when I got my black belt in karate. I was 12 years old, and one of the only girls in a room full of boys, shorter and smaller than everyone else. I trembled with both nerves and adrenaline, consumed by my white karate outfit, enormous on my small frame. When I walked into the dojo filled with the senior black-belt teachers and mentors, so many of them women, I squared my shoulders and filled my chest with as much strength as I could summon. The head Sempai gave me the option to do 25 push-ups instead of the 50 push-ups the boys had to do. I did 50 push-ups.

As I grew up, I kept “força” close to me, a commitment to my own strength. At times, especially as a woman embarking on my own journey in medicine, it challenged me. During the winter before I started medical school, I decided to investigate a breathing problem I had been having. I had suffered from seasonal allergies for years, but for months I had a sensation of not being able to breathe out of my nose. I saw multiple doctors, all of whom told me it was simply allergies, and that nothing was out of the ordinary. It wasn’t until I saw a female ENT that my concerns were investigated further, and she discovered on endoscopy that my adenoids were massive, compromising my entire nasal passageway. Throughout all my visits I had known some clinical function was amiss, yet I didn’t believe I was smart enough, intuitive enough, to advocate for myself. Even after my adenoidectomy, the repercussions of my own feelings of powerlessness stayed with me, and I vowed to maintain my dogma of “força” when in medical school, on the other side of a clinical encounter.

“Força” is a word I still repeat in my head during clinical rotations, a mantra to myself in a setting where women still face adversity. It’s a reminder to myself of my ambitions and capabilities, a tenet for every woman in medicine who deserves equity. Earlier on in my third

year of medical school, I tried to ignore the “sweetie” and “honey” from patients, the remarks that I looked too young to be a doctor, and all the other comments reserved exclusively for female students. “Força” is a needed reminder of my roots in these moments, that the strength of women who came before me is the same force I carry inside of me. Months into rotations I commit to maintaining this sense of strength in myself. I take effort to move and operate with confidence, asserting that I am capable and qualified to be there.

“Força” is the word I chanted during one of my first deliveries witnessed as a student. The mother, a Brazilian-Portuguese woman who didn’t speak any English, was flanked only by her sister. The entire room, composed only of women, chanted “Força” with every contraction, holding her legs and willing her to push with all her might. Our team, all female nurses, doctors, and midwives, pushed together with her for the entire hour.

Though I tutor and mentor many medical students, I have a particular group of women that continuously meet with me, especially recently as their own board exams approach. Just a few weeks ago, I told them to choose their own word for a Post-it note. They can keep it on their mirror, in their pocket, or wherever else it will remind them of their own resilience in both the journey and reaching the destination. My own smudged Post-it note remains in the front pocket of my backpack, a reminder I take with me every day to rotations. Even if the Post-it note crumples or its edges rip, I will carry the strength of the word “Força” with me throughout my career as a woman in medicine. It’s a symbol of perseverance, of women rising above inequity through the power of their own strength and capabilities.