

Doctor/Nurse: Dr. Dolores Mercedes Piñero, (1892–1975) was born in San Juan, Puerto Rico when the island was still a Spanish colony. Following her primary and secondary education, Piñero was sent to Boston, became fluent in English and in 1913 earned her medical degree from Boston's College of Physicians and Surgeons. Dr. Piñero was one of the first four Puerto Rican women to earn a medical degree. The women she followed are María Elisa Rivera Díaz, M.D. and Ana Janer, M.D. in 1909, and Palmira Gatell, M.D. in 1910. As a new doctor Piñero returned to Puerto Rico to set up her medical and anesthesia practice.

In 1917, with the advent of World War I, and with Puerto Rico now a U.S. Territory after Spain ceded her to the United States in accordance with the 1898 Treaty of Paris that officially ended the Spanish-American War, the United States conferred U.S. citizenship on Puerto Ricans. This meant men were eligible for the draft and men could volunteer to join the army.

After the United States entered the war, Piñero applied for a position as a military surgeon only to be turned down because of her gender. The army believed they had enough male physicians to cover their needs. However, after writing a letter to the Army Surgeon General in Washington, D.C., Dr. Piñero, an anesthesiologist, received a telegram ordering her to report to Camp Las Casas in Puerto Rico where she was assigned to the Medical Service Corps of the Army Medical Department.

The Army was affected by the shortage of male physicians specializing in anesthesiology. At the time anesthesiology was a low-salary specialty from which male physicians refrained. Thus, it was a speciality in which female physicians were able to practice. But anesthesia is required in all operating rooms, military operating rooms were no exception, therefore, the Army reluctantly began hiring women physicians as civilian contract employees. As civilian contract physicians, women had a negative gender-disparate status within the military. Civilian contract physicians could not wear uniforms and had little authority, albeit they were medical doctors with gender-equal medical credentials. Still, it was an opportunity for women to serve in the war effort.

Piñero signed such a contract with the Army in 1918 and was assigned to the Army General Hospital of Fort Brooke, as an anesthesiologist. She and four male colleagues received orders to open a 400-bed hospital to combat the Swine Flu epidemic that had infected one quarter of all soldiers and killed more than 55,000 American troops. After the flu epidemic ended, Piñero was ordered back to the Army base hospital at San Juan where, after the war, she returned to her private practice. Among the nurses who served with Piñero during the war was Rosa González.

Rosa González, RN (1889–1981) was born and raised in the town of Lares, Puerto Rico where she received her primary and secondary education. As Dr. Piñero, she was a child on the island when Spain ceded Puerto Rico to the United States in accord with the 1898 Treaty of Paris.

González earned her nursing certificate from the Presbyterian Hospital School of Nursing in San Juan in 1909 and in 1914 went to New York City to complete her RN licensed certificate. Two years later, with her certificate in hand, González returned to her homeland. She organized a clinic in the city of Arecibo and that same year founded and

presided over *The Association of Registered Nurses of Puerto Rico*. The following year, González wrote her first book *Diccionario Médico para la Enfermera* (Nurse's Medical Dictionary).

During World War I, González was sent to the Puerto Rican city of Ponce to assist Dr. Dolores Piñero and four male doctors to open a 400-bed hospital to combat the spread of Swine Flu, as described above. After her war service, González served as the Director of Puerto Rico's Presbyterian Hospital School of Nursing from 1919 to 1924.

In 1926 she started a magazine for nurses called *Puerto Rico* and she founded several institutions. Among those she organized were the *Amarosa Sanitarium* in the town of Villaba (1929), the school of the Institute of Medical Surgery (1930), and the nursing school on the grounds of the School of Tropical Medicine in San Juan (1931). In her hometown of Lares in 1936, González organized the first women's clinic and served as its director until 1940.

Her book, *Los Hechos Desconocidos* (Unknown Facts) was published in 1929. She dedicated it to the Governor of Puerto Rico, the Puerto Rican Legislature, the Medical Association, to the Puerto Rican Nurses Association, and to the Association of Puerto Rican Women Surrogates. She used her book to promote the establishment of a Nurse Examiners Board in Puerto Rico that, in fact, was established in 1930, the year following publication of her book.

As a women's rights activist, González denounced the discriminatory practices against women in the health care professions. She believed that the "Medical Class" discriminated against female nurses and stated this clearly in her book where she wrote:

"In our country any man who is active in a political party, will be considered capable of handling an administrative position, regardless of how inept he is."

"To this day the 'Medical Class' has not accepted nurses who have the same goal as doctors: the well-being of the patient. Both professions need each other in order to be successful."

When the United States entered World War II González was named Director of the Nurses Services of the American Red Cross in Puerto Rico. Until her death of natural causes at age 92, she continued to provide free medical services for the children in Guaynabo where she resided.

Sources: Wikipedia specific to each woman.