

“A Doctor Who Becomes a Friend”

Interview with Dr. Olga Karachenets

Dr. Olga, thank you for agreeing to give our publication this interview. Patients and our readers speak of you with great respect, noting your attentiveness, sensitivity, and ability to offer genuine support. Many say that being with you feels easy and reassuring, that you are not just a physician but a true ally on the path to health. Please tell us—how did your journey in medicine begin?

— I am a doctor in the second generation: my mother worked in a hospital, my father was a forensic medical expert. Medicine surrounded me from childhood. I often waited for my mother after her shifts and listened to her stories about patients. For me, it wasn't only about medicines and white coats—it was about her care, her attention, and her desire to help each person. That's when I first felt the urge to be by people's side and support them.

The final decision came when I was 12 years old, after doctors literally saved my life. I woke up one morning and firmly decided: *“I will be a doctor.”* That thought became my inner compass and never left me again.

I graduated from the Bukovinian State Medical Academy in Ukraine (now the Bukovinian State Medical University), completed my internship, and began working as a phthisiatrician-pulmonologist. It was a difficult but very important specialty. In 2005, I emigrated to the United States. The path was long: diploma verification, new exams, adapting to a different healthcare system. But since 2010, I have been practicing here, and today my medical career spans more than 19 years, including 15 in America.

My son, by the way, is now in medical school, and seeing him follow the same path is a tremendous joy. For our family, medicine has become more than a profession—it is a way of life, a way of helping people and being close to them.

– Why did you choose family medicine in particular?

— At first, I considered other areas—internal medicine, pulmonology—but my heart led me to the right path. For me, it's important to be there for both children and adults, to see the family as a whole. There is something special about this: I get to follow several generations of one family. Imagine: a great-grandmother comes, then her daughter, grandson, and even great-grandchildren. I know their history, understand hereditary risks, and can intervene early to prevent disease.

– What is the difference between a family doctor and a general internist?

— A family doctor treats patients from birth through advanced age. We aren't limited by a narrow specialization and often care for multiple members of the same family. This allows us to see the “big picture”—how genetics, habits, and lifestyle shape health over generations.

In addition, family doctors perform more hands-on procedures: we give injections, treat wounds, perform minor surgeries such as removing growths. This versatility makes the work very dynamic and engaging.

– You’ve been active in volunteering for many years. What does this part of your life mean to you?

— Volunteering is an essential part of my life. For more than 10 years, I’ve been helping at Hadi Medical Clinic in Brooklyn Park, which serves low-income immigrants without insurance—people for whom healthcare is often out of reach. Seeing gratitude in their eyes is an immense reward.

I also work with the Protez Foundation, which supports Ukrainian soldiers. As a medical volunteer, I’ve traveled to Honduras, Poland, and Ukraine, where I assisted in the Kharkiv region. These trips taught me to value every chance to help. Medicine truly knows no borders.

– Many people only go to the doctor when something already hurts. How do you motivate patients to focus on prevention?

— That is indeed a challenge. I rely on evidence-based medicine and try to explain things in simple, clear terms. In the U.S., there are strict preventive care protocols—mammograms, colonoscopies, blood work, screenings for smokers. And the most important part—it’s covered by insurance, so patients don’t pay out of pocket.

But numbers alone don’t always convince. That’s why I find an individual approach: for some I draw a diagram, for others I share a story from practice. For example, I explain that one in eight women worldwide faces breast cancer, and only an early mammogram can save a life.

I respect every patient’s choice, but I see it as my duty to communicate information in a way that ensures they not only “hear” but truly understand the value of prevention.

– How does lifestyle affect health?

— Lifestyle has an enormous impact: nutrition, sleep, physical activity. I try to lead by example. I play volleyball, walk my dog, watch my diet. A doctor cannot teach what they don’t practice themselves.

With patients, we go into details: how much they sleep, how much water they drink, how many hours they spend on devices. This is especially important for teenagers—addiction to gaming directly affects health. Modern research shows: lack of sleep leads to obesity because the body stops processing calories properly. Sometimes simply fixing sleep schedules has more impact than any diet.

– Fall is flu season. How do you view vaccination?

— I see it as one of the most important tools of protection. Flu vaccination is especially vital for people with chronic lung and heart conditions, as well as elderly patients. Scientists update the vaccine every year to match new virus strains. It is the best safeguard against complications.

I always encourage patients to get vaccinated—not just by saying “you should,” but by explaining how dangerous flu can be and what the consequences are. Once people understand, it becomes much easier to accept.

– Today we often hear about the rising incidence of strokes and heart attacks. How can people reduce these risks?

— Strokes are usually linked to high blood pressure, and heart attacks to high cholesterol, smoking, and diabetes. The problem is that many people don't even know their numbers.

My advice is simple: get checked every year, monitor blood pressure, sugar, and lipids. Then add exercise, healthy nutrition, and quit smoking. These aren't just "nice words" but concrete steps that save lives.

– You work with all types of health insurance. What should patients know when choosing coverage?

— Yes, I accept all insurances. Most often, people choose between employer coverage, government insurance, or Medicare for patients 65+. It's important to understand what services are included, which doctors are in-network, and above all—not to go without insurance at all. Young people sometimes think: "I'm healthy, I don't need it." But life proves otherwise. Even a minor injury without insurance can be a financial disaster for a family.

– And finally: what is your main piece of health advice for the Minnesota Community?

— Take care of yourself. Health starts in childhood: sports, routine, healthy eating. Don't forget balance between work and personal life. A person is healthy when they live in harmony.

And one more thing: don't delay seeing a doctor. Often one timely visit can do more than years of treatment.

Epilogue

The interview with Dr. Olga Karachenets leaves an impression of lightness and confidence. She not only talks about medicine—she lives it. In her words, one feels the experience of a doctor, the wisdom of a woman, and the kindness of a person who knows how to listen and support. Perhaps this is why her patients say: "With Dr. Olga, you feel calm. She is not just a doctor—she is a friend."

Interview by Alesia Luhavtsova