

LEAP

with Dr. Gita Pensa



Physician 1: Selene L, M.D.

Selene was born and bred in Miami. Her parents were born in Miami, too, after her grandparents emigrated from Cuba. Her parents were prominent in the community there — her dad owned a boutique hotel, and her mother was an interior designer. All her life, Selene felt she was primed to be a superstar. She would be the very model of a successful Latina whose family moved here for a better life. She decided very early on that she wanted to be a doctor. She went to college in New England and then returned to Miami for medical school.

During an off-site rotation in a private OB-Gyn practice, Selene decided that this was the life she desired. She stayed in Miami for residency and cultivated a relationship in that practice and signed on as a junior partner right after residency. During residency she met her partner, Paolo, who owned a real estate firm. Selene and Paolo chose not to have children, but Selene absolutely loved doing deliveries and taking care of expectant moms. She loved to pamper them. She was quite popular among Miami's socialite young expectant mothers. She did some aesthetic work in the office, too — Botox, hair removal, etc. She took pride in the appearance of her office, in the experience of her patients, and in her own appearance at work. In the OR, she also prided herself on her technique, and her closures even after C-sections rivaled any plastic surgeon. Though it had its stressors, overall, she loved her job and enjoyed thinking of new ways to expand her practice.

When the terrible thing happened, Selene was unprepared. The day was like any other on L&D. A nurse handed her a tracing; she signed off on it and went in to do another delivery. She was later called emergently to a room; that same nurse said that patient's tracings now looked terrible. Selene realized the baby was in great distress and immediately took the patient to the OR for a C-section. The baby had APGARS of 0. After resuscitation, the baby was only minimally improved and was transferred to the NICU. He started having seizures shortly after that.

Selene went back to look at the tracing from earlier that day and realized that it was indeed abnormal. She just hadn't noticed. She didn't know why. But she could have done something then, and she didn't. It became apparent that the baby had significant anoxic brain injury. He had ongoing seizures, severe developmental delay, and was blind. The parents sued Selene, as she expected they would. She would have sued, too. The demand was astronomical — this baby would need total care until the day he died. Selene could not live with it — with any of it.



She felt swallowed by guilt, and angry at herself for not having made enough of the initial tracing. She oscillated between these feelings. When the guilt was too heavy to bear, she went to anger and berated herself for her stupidity and all it had cost her. And yet, what had it cost that young family? Her confidence was shattered. She could not project the image of a confident physician any longer.

Selene no longer enjoyed going out with Paolo, and began drinking more heavily at home, on her own. She no longer dressed stylishly for work. She barely made it in on time, looking as though she hadn't slept – which she hadn't. She didn't sleep anymore. She feared losing everything. The plaintiffs were not interested in settling. They knew that a jury would award an enormous judgment, because there clearly was error, and a life had been ruined because of it.

Paolo convinced Selene to take some time off work. She did, but all she did was drink. She could feel herself spiraling. No friends came to see her. Her mother tried to comfort her, but she didn't understand. Paolo came to Selene's next meeting with her attorney, when she was supposed to be preparing for her deposition. Paolo told him the truth about what Selene had been going through. He recommended a new program that might help her. She agreed to sign up, but has her doubts that anyone or anything can help her, ever again.