



Driven to Serve

**Reserve recruiter finds medical
treasure in South Florida**

Story by Master Sgt. Jason Tudor

Photos by Tech. Sgt. Paul Dean

The résumé reads more like that of a presidential appointee than a doctor from Miami.

A cum laude graduate from medical school; a magna cum laude master's degree in business administration; a score of professional affiliations up and down the Eastern Seaboard; fluently speaks English, French and Spanish; runs her own successful business; and has built a personal bibliography that would make an experienced journalist blush.

Dr. Gabriela Cora's professional credentials include four separate listings in Who's Who and seats on editorial boards as well as a raft of television and radio appearances. Certainly, the compilation of knowledge and experience would have earned her a senior job at any top corporation, but she wanted more. So, instead of Fortune 500 luxury, she chose to join a company that delivers 500-pound bombs to the misfortune and discomfort of its enemies.

Dr. Cora has added "commissioned officer in the Air Force Reserve" to her list of credits. As a major, she'll fill a 4-year-old need for a psychiatrist on the medical staff of the 482nd Fighter Wing at Homestead Air Reserve Base, Fla.

She said this opportunity has been a long time coming.

"My driving force is the contribution I can make," Dr. Cora said. "I see myself as someone who will be able to provide guidance and leadership in psychiatry and psychology treatment."

Her appointment to the post isn't random. Her life's successes are not flukes, nor were any of them easy.

Dr. Cora and her family moved from a Brooklyn, N.Y., neighborhood that was getting "tougher and tougher" to chase business opportunities in Argentina. She attended British schools and regimented her time. English classes in the morning. Spanish in the afternoon. A day that started at 7:30 a.m. and ended at 5:30 p.m.; according to her Web site, she studied psychology, world religions, astrology and metaphysics on her own, as she continued to excel in her academic studies at school, graduating as class valedictorian.

"The academics were always very easy to me. I've always enjoyed the structured time," she said.

Dr. Cora was the first in her family — her father is an entrepreneur; her mother worked in banking — to attend college, also in Argentina. Her brother and sister followed. The question was never "if" she'd go, only "when."

"I was so driven, my parents often said, 'Sit back and calm down!'" she said.

Meanwhile, there was the question of what to do with her life? Dr. Cora said the choice was finding one profession where she could excel. So, she chose medical school, the Universidad de Buenos Aires School of Medicine, in 1989. An already difficult choice was made even harder by the fact that she had two children.

"Graduating medical school with two children was the toughest obstacle I've overcome," she said. "You just go go go. A lot of people asked, 'How can you?' I said, 'Why can't I?'"

Since then, she's criss-crossed the globe working with giants of industry like Coca-Cola, Pfizer, the World Bank and others speaking about performance and development, crisis leadership, crisis management, stress management, and other specialty areas. She's given presentations in the United States, the Americas, Europe, Africa and Asia.

Meanwhile, her life had not been without civil service, either. From 1995 to 1999, Dr. Cora served as a lieutenant commander and clinical research associate with the U.S. Public Health Service in Bethesda, Md. But getting back into public service hasn't been easy. She's sought an opportunity since 1999, when she moved from Maryland to Miami. Nothing concrete presented itself until a

mutual friend, an Air Force officer, pointed her toward the Air Force Reserve and Master Sgt. Michael Edwards.

Fortune smiled on Sergeant Edwards by delivering Dr. Cora to him. Homestead had the long-standing need, and recruiting psychiatrists is tough. In fact, just five psychiatrists serve in the entire Air Force Reserve, with another 140 on active duty, according to the Air Force Personnel Center. That means if the psychiatrists were to split the load evenly, each one would have 2,627 potential patients from both service components.

"A fellow recruiter worked for 12 years and never put in a psychiatrist," Sergeant Edwards said. "They are very hard to come by."

Dr. Cora recently had finished her master's degree in health administration and policy. Not long afterward, she knocked on Sergeant Edwards' door. Both leaped head first into the Reserve recruiting opportunity.

"Dr. Cora came to the recruiting interview well armed; totally prepared," he said. "She had all the documentation, and her organizational skills stood out. She's been ready and waiting for some time."

The full process of getting Dr. Cora her gold leaves took about eight months, with paperwork stops at Air Force Reserve Command headquarters, the Air Force Personnel Center and the Pentagon. All the while, Dr. Cora — who'd waited for more than 38 months to find the Air Force Reserve slot — sat patiently. So patiently, in fact, Sergeant Edwards gave her a nickname.

"Wonder Woman," he said, laughing. "For a lot of people, when the opportunity doesn't happen quickly, they just walk away. Not her. She was resilient and hung in there."

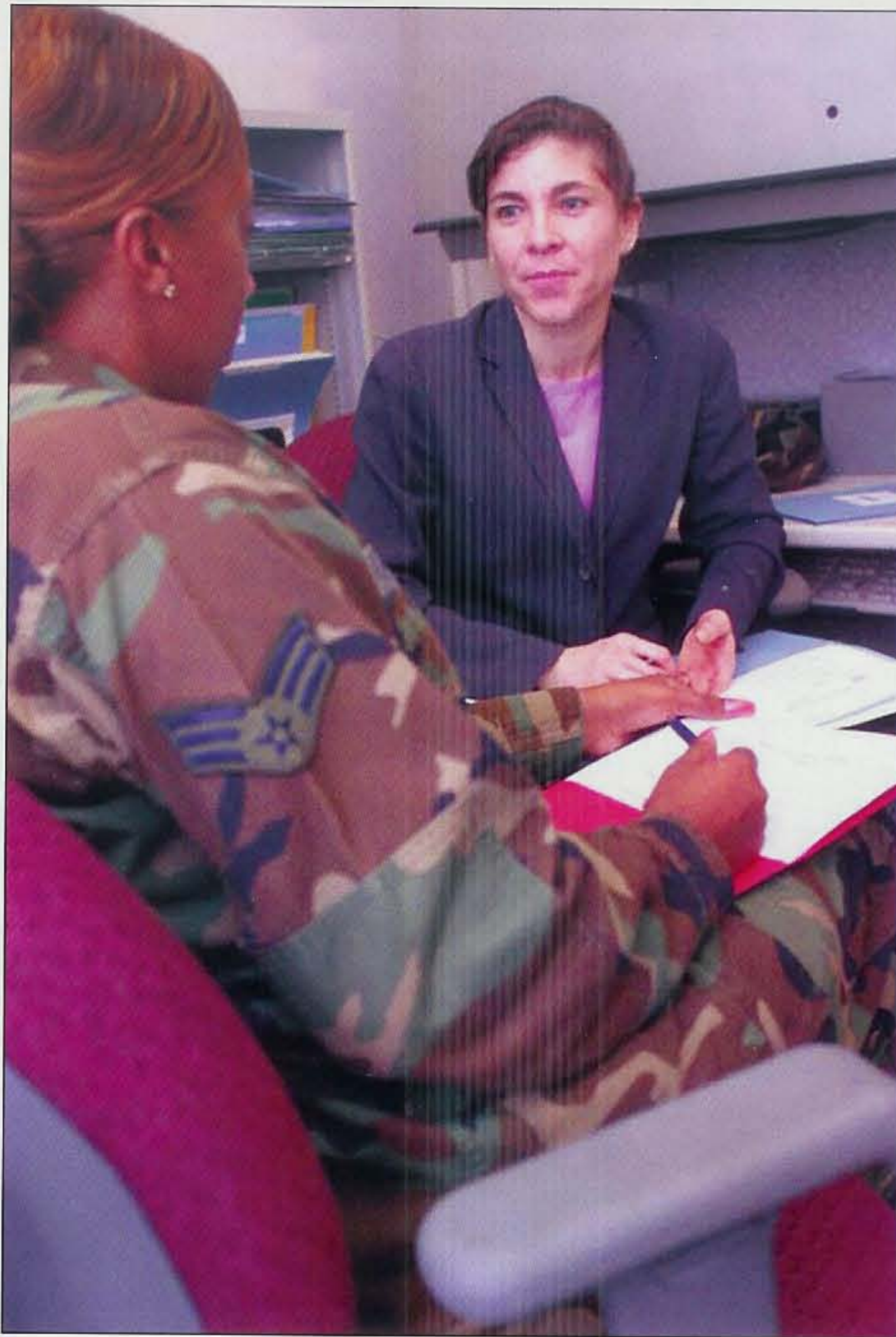
Col. (Dr.) Scott Howell, 482nd Medical Squadron commander, is also happy Dr. Cora "hung in there." He had no idea she so actively sought a position with the military for so long until Sergeant Edwards championed her commission. Dr. Howell said her education, enthusiasm and training stood out.

"Had I known about her earlier, I would have hired her in two minutes," he said.

Echoing Sergeant Edwards' sentiment, Dr. Howell said



Dr. Cora fills a four-year need for a psychiatrist on the medical staff of the 482nd Fighter Wing at Homestead Air Reserve Base, Fla. Throughout Air Force Reserve Command, recruiting psychiatrists is very tough. Dr. Cora is one of only five in the command.



Senior Airman Latasha Chambers of the 482nd Medical Squadron, talks to Maj. (Dr.) Gabriela Cora during her in-processing Aug. 4. Dr. Cora said she intends to bring a full spectrum of support to the 482nd Fighter Wing, including building better ties with the Department of Veterans Affairs.

recruiting mental health nurses and psychiatrists is always difficult, adding he's also losing a mental health nurse from his 120-person staff soon.

"If we didn't have Dr. Cora coming in now, we may have been stretched," he said.

Her vision of military service fulfilled, Dr. Cora's ready to get on with helping people at the South Florida military base.

"It's a very nice fit, given what I can contribute," she said. "I have a pretty good eye at anticipating things. One of those challenges will be to move things to the next level."

Dr. Cora intends to bring a full spectrum of support to the wing, including building better ties with the Department of Veterans Affairs.

"I'm already in touch with friends there to get that process started," she said.

Her first appointment lasts three years. Will she stay longer? If her career and standout résumé are any indication, the answer is easy.

"My driving force is the personal contribution I can make," she said. "I could see myself doing it again." ★

(Sergeant Tudor is a public affairs NCO assigned to AFRC Recruiting Service at Robins Air Force Base, Ga.)