

Beatriz Tapia, MD, MPH

2005 US-Mexico Border Health Fellowship Program, Harlingen/Laredo, Texas

Beatriz Tapia, MD, MPH, found HSHPS through a job fair in Baltimore. Less than a year later, she was placed in the first cohort of the Summer 2005 HSHPS Environmental Health Along the US-Mexico Border Program at the University of Texas Health Science Center San Antonio (UTHSCSA) in Harlingen and Laredo, Texas. Barely six months later, she was hired as a UTHSCSA faculty member. Now eight years later, she is a senior lecturer where she teaches and coordinates the South Texas Environmental Education and Research Program (STEER), the very program she participated in, and is field investigator and lead senior research to the Hispanic Autism Research Center.

“I have a soft spot for HSHPS,” said Dr. Tapia.

STEER, a past Graduate Fellowship Training Program (GFTP), was a 10-week internship with four weeks spent in different parts of the US-Mexico border. The program expanded Dr. Tapia's knowledge of border health and public health beyond a textbook. She was exposed to key leaders of the community and was witness to physicians at the front lines. Visiting the *colonias* was an eye opener.

“I did not realize that in a developed country there would be such poverty living conditions.”

After completing the training program, Dr. Tapia knew she wanted to go back.

“Learning the lack of providers that are within the border region...In Texas, we have the highest shortage of health professionals nationwide. How can that happen? I wanted to come back. I wanted to be one of the people that can make a difference in the community.

Prior to STEER, Dr. Tapia volunteered and gained a variety of public health opportunities – from serving as a *promotora* in Mexico, teaching 25 women first aid, to working as a researcher in women's health for six years.

In 2005, she received her Masters in Public Health from the Bloomberg School of Public Health at Johns Hopkins University (JHSPH) where she figured out she wanted to do environmental health with a focus on Hispanic health.

The interest in medicine began when Dr. Tapia was eight-years-old, growing up in Chicago, and serving as an impromptu Spanish translator for her mother on doctor's visits.

Ultimately, it was the lack of guidance from Hispanic health professionals that motivated Dr. Tapia to continue with health and to give to the community at large - her passion.

“I wanted somebody to hold my hand and there was nobody there. There are less than 15 percent of Hispanics in medical school and 13 at [UTHSCSA]. Things have not changed in terms of Hispanics in the field.

That's what really drove me in the end. I knew that I wanted to make a difference.”