

**David A. Acosta MD**  
HSHPs Treasurer  
Associate Vice Chancellor, Diversity and Inclusion  
UC Davis Health System  
Senior Associate Dean for Equity, Diversity & Inclusion  
Health Sciences Clinical Professor  
UC Davis School of Medicine



David A. Acosta, MD, is Associate Vice Chancellor of Diversity and Inclusion at the UC Davis Health System. He leads diversity activities across all health system operations, including the UC Davis School of Medicine, the Betty Irene Moore School of Nursing, UC Davis Medical Center, and the physician practice group.

Dr. Acosta is a family practice physician and is a recognized leader in creating, managing and directing diversity and inclusion programs. Prior to joining UC Davis, He developed significant diversity programs for the University of Washington School of Medicine, including establishing a Rural Health Fellowship Program for Tacoma Family Medicine and founding the Center for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion at the university's school of medicine.

**What drew you to medicine?**

My love of science and my interest in social justice. I was fortunate to grow up in a family that espoused the virtue of caring for others. I can remember that from day one. Growing up Catholic, my parents instilled in us from a very early age that helping others was the norm and the expectation. So I have vivid memories of travelling down to Tijuana, Mexico, as a family and working with my parents at an orphanage that we visited once a month. We'd bring and distribute clothes, food, furniture, toys, OTC medications, and spend the weekend building or repairing something. Our family doctor (non-Hispanic) would sometimes join us, and would provide free medical care to the children. That inspired me at a young age. As I continued in school, I wound up attending Catholic schools (elementary, secondary, college), and taught by Jesuits. That opportunity continued to validate the importance of social justice for me. As I look back, I can now see what a gift that truly was - how fortunate I was - and how instrumental it was in formulating my decision to become a physician.

**Did you have any models of Hispanic health professionals growing up?**

My oldest brother, who is 10 years older, is an ER physician by training. He was a role model in that he was the first in our family to attend college and to attend medical school. Although at the time we were not close, he helped me realize that my dream was possible to reach. Our philosophy about medical practice and who to serve is very different, and that ideology separates us. Other than that, I really had no other models of Hispanic health professionals.

**What made you want to get involved with serving minorities and the underserved populations?**

Again, it was the social justice angle. I had always volunteered in underserved communities since high school. Being Latino and witnessing firsthand the inequities that your family members and community face every day is enough to drive that desire within. Experiencing the injustices that society throws at you is enough to make you want to do something about it. My dad would always tell us as kids that we needed to be part of the solution, not the problem. And he was right.

**What have you learned throughout your career that you would like pass on to future health professionals?**

Always be on the lookout for opportunities that may come your way. All you need to have is the courage, or the *ganas*, to take advantage of them. Even if you chose the wrong opportunity or it didn't work out, believe that more opportunities will come your way.

I think it's intriguing how some opportunities find their way to you even if you weren't looking....as if they were meant to be. The only thing stopping you from leveraging those opportunities is you.

Lastly, I used to think that we could lay out our destiny and follow it. I have come to learn that our trajectory as physicians is unpredictable. I would have never predicted that I would be doing the things that I am doing today. As I look back, the journey and experiences I have had along the way now make sense. But at the time of those experiences, I did not realize how things would eventually be connected.

**What do you know now that you would've liked to know as a student just starting your journey?**

I think it's really important to find what your passion is and then pursue it. I've encountered so many disgruntled physicians who are unhappy practicing in the specialties that they weren't necessarily passionate about, or practice types they fell into. When you realize that you have choices it makes all the difference in the world.

Secondly, find many mentors along the way. I always used to think that I would be a burden to faculty or physicians that I wanted to shadow, or have, for mentors. I have finally realized that there are many, many physicians out there, especially minority physicians, who are passionate about becoming a mentor and have a huge desire to give back. Students never need to be hesitant to ask. Even if you get turned down there is always someone out there that is willing and able. Don't take no personally!

Third, it's okay to ask what you think are dumb questions. Count on humility...it will take you further.

Lastly, surround yourself with positive people who see and believe in the potential you have. I am not saying to surround yourself with people who only give you positive strokes! Surround yourself with people who will challenge you and push you to achieve your highest potential. People who will take the time to listen, and who will provide you with good advice.

**Where do you see yourself going from here?**

I most likely will finish out my years here at UC Davis. I'm energized and stimulated with the diversity and inclusion work that I am involved in right now, and that inspires me deeply. There are lots of opportunities here to catalyze change and a strong desire to do meaningful work. I have come to realize that I do my best work when I'm challenged. I'm looking forward to someday starting up a new Research Center for Workforce Diversity here.