

Ciro V. Sumaya, MD, MPHTM

HSHP Institutional Representative
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Community has been at the heart of Dr. Sumaya's, MD, MPHTM, career since he received his medical degree in 1966 from the University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston. He traveled extensively after that – completing a rotating internship at the University of Southern California-affiliated Los Angeles County General Hospital, a pediatric residency at St. Christopher's Hospital for Children in Philadelphia from 1969-1971, and then completing a dual pediatric infectious disease post-graduate fellowship and Master of Public Health and Tropical Medicine degree at Tulane University School of Medicine and School of Public Health, respectively, in 1973.

The opportunity to travel throughout the US was a contributing factor in Dr. Sumaya's decision to pursue public health in addition to traditional medicine. "I wanted to see the links to the community better," he says.

In the 1970s to 1980s, the field of public health was on the fringes, but Dr. Sumaya understood that learning more about it was essential to making connections. "Public health brought the medicine to life," he explains.

In the mid-1980s, Dr. Sumaya became increasingly involved in leadership roles in large scale health research and education program development, academic-to-community outreach efforts, health professions workforce and policy, and other health issues, with a particular emphasis on underserved populations. His selection as an administrator for Health Resources and Services Administration in 1994, opened his eyes to another arena: the federal government.

"I saw the great disparities in the leadership of HRSA on a federal level," he said. "We [Latinos] were not well-represented in leadership at the federal government. Our numbers were two percent Latinos 20 years ago. Something wasn't moving well there."

This observation of ill represented minorities in key health leadership and workforce positions planted the seed of what has now grown to become Hispanic-Serving Health Professions Schools. Dr. Sumaya, along with Elena Rios, MD, Fernando Mendoza, MD, and others, looked to the training model established by historically black colleges and universities.

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“Why can’t we form a unit similar to HBCUs for Latinos and at the grad level?” he asks.

Dr. Sumaya was instrumental in bringing together presidents and deans from schools of medicine with 16 institutions represented. Over time, dues were sought and a board was created. While managing this project, he was also working on the formation of what has now become the National Hispanic Medical Association.

“That duo is, I think, a very powerful grouping that hopefully continues to thrive,” says Dr. Sumaya. “We are so behind in equity in the workforce across all of the field.”

Dr. Sumaya’s involvement with HSHPS has come full circle. Today, he is an Institutional Representative of HSHPS, representing Texas A&M University System Health Science Center (TAMUSHSC).

After 11 years as Founding Dean of the School of Rural Public Health, Dr. Sumaya has stepped down to the role of full tenured professor in the Department of Health Policy and Management. He continues to pursue health services research, including greater focus on health care workforce analysis and policy, as well as the development of federal and global public health courses for the school’s curriculum through continued support from the Cox Endowed Chair.

He wants to continue to be a part of leadership appointments within the health field but, he says, he will be rearranging his lifestyle within the next couple of years.

He ponders one of the eternal human struggles – aging. “What is it we’re going to do when we’re 84? “We’re living longer.”

Dr. Sumaya plays piano, is working on a historical fiction novel, and shares a growing Latin American art collection with his wife. He brings up community: “There’s a connection between value systems and art – it connects with the community.”

But the call to service – that part that pushed him toward medicine and public health – comes back into focus again. “How can I help the common good?” Dr. Sumaya asks.