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Dr. Jorge Girotti was elected to be part of the HSHPS executive committee in 2003. He is also a member of the Illinois State Board of Health, the Board of Governors of the Institute of Medicine of Chicago, and officially advises University of Illinois student organizations ranging from the Health Oriented Latino Association (premedical group), La Raza Medical Student Association, and the Health Disparities Task Force. Dr. Girotti holds a doctorate in education with an emphasis in policy and administration. He joined the UIC College of Medicine in 1982. For many years, his work centered on the development of students from underrepresented minority backgrounds to prepare them for entry into the medical profession. In 1991, Dr. Girotti was awarded funds to establish and direct a Hispanic Center of Excellence at UIC. Dr. Girotti's research interests include, among others, cultural competence education and development of professionalism/humanism for BA/MD students.

When did you know you wanted to pursue a career working in the healthcare field? What motivates you or inspires you to be a part of the public health movement?

I first realized the issues that Spanish-speaking patients faced in health care when I arrived in the US with my family in the 1970s. My passion is in the field of education, particularly the education of Latino youth, so my motivation is to promote and motivate young people in our communities to be part of the solution and become a health care professional. Because I work in a medical school I see the importance of improving and increasing the role that future physicians play in the public health arena.

In your opinion, what role does the Hispanic Center of Excellence at UIC play in advancing opportunities for underrepresented populations in health careers? Why is it important?

The Center is fortunate to receive funding from the State of Illinois and the US Department of Health and Human Services, which makes it possible for us to deal with the entire educational pipeline, from high school to academic medicine. The fact that Latinos are so poorly represented in medicine worsens disparities for Latino patients and families because the system lacks professionals that understand both the culture and language to provide the highest quality of care. This is exactly what we try to address through all of our programs. It is not enough to increase the numbers of Latinos in medicine and other health professions; we need to engage them early and continuously on the specific challenges that face our communities. We want students that can do well within the biomedical model, but also be conscious of the social determinants of health.

Why do you think it is important to focus particularly on improving the health of the Latino population? What are your specific research interests?

Unless we are able to energize and motivate our young people across the country to make their education a priority, we will see widening gaps in the health of the community.

“The Latino community is growing at a rapid rate, certainly more rapidly than other segments of our society. This reality demands that we design innovative ways to reach out to Latino youth as they progress through their education so that they see the connection of their interest and talent in the sciences, and the potential benefits to the larger community.”

My scholarship revolves around the development, implementation and evaluation of effective models that incorporate cultural and linguistic competence, both for Latino students and also for medical students of diverse backgrounds that demonstrate a genuine interest in improving the health status of Latinos.

How long have you been involved with HSHPS? What made you want to get involved with this organization? How do you see HSHPS playing a role in the public health field and improving the health of Hispanics?

I was part of the early discussions that eventually led to the development of HSHPS. We fulfill a very specific role in the national sphere since our members are health professions schools that have made a tangible commitment to include more Latinos in their educational programs. From early on I realized that the way to impact the national dialogue on the challenges facing our institutions was to join hands with colleagues that shared those same concerns. The strength of HSHPS is that it garners institutional commitment to the development of future academic and research leadership from within our own communities. Our role will continue to be refining the connection between institutional missions and the actual initiatives that make achievement of those missions possible.

What are your personal and professional future goals? How do these goals relate to improving public health?

My hope is to continue to develop the Hispanic Center of Excellence into a national model for other institutions seeking to increase their Latino enrollment. I want our students to be prepared to address a wide range of issues, from patient care in the community, to participation in academic health centers as teachers and investigators.

Each student must realize that they are a unique resource for their own community and the entire nation and that they need to reach above and beyond to create sustainable change.