

# **Norma A. Perez, MD, DrPH**

**HSHPS Vice President  
Director, Hispanic Center of Excellence  
Executive Director, Frontera de Salud  
Assistant Professor of Internal Medicine-Geriatrics and  
Preventive Medicine and Community Health  
University of Texas Medical Branch School of Medicine**



Norma A. Perez, MD, DrPH, is an advocate of higher education for promising Hispanic students and supporter and mentor in the Hispanic communities of Texas. Dr. Perez is a Houston native, earned her MD from the Universidad de Monterrey, Monterrey, Mexico, and completed her residency training in Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation at the Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico, Mexico City, Mexico. She was a practicing physiatrist in Mexico before returning to Houston where she completed her doctorate in Public Health in International and Family Health at the University of Texas – Houston, Health Science Center School of Public Health.

Since her tenure at UTMB, Dr. Perez has served on several committees including UTMB's Diversity Council and the School of Medicine's Admissions Committee. In July 2010, she was a guest on the popular Fox News program *Hola Houston*, addressing the need for Hispanic physicians because of the two percent year growth of Hispanics in the State of Texas. Dr. Perez's goal is to inspire and guide those students with an interest in medicine or other postgraduate education.

## **What drew you to Public Health and Medicine?**

From my experiences as a clinician, I came to understand that there were broader issues affecting the health of my patient population. I really credit my mother; she was determined that I would have a career. I'd always done well in the sciences and it seemed a natural progression. Once I started, I fell in love.

## **What exactly do you do in your role as Director of the Hispanic Center of Excellence, housed in the Office of Student Affairs and Admissions, School of Medicine at UTMB?**

I'm privileged to work with a very diverse group of highly skilled and progressive people. We work daily to address and serve our students, faculty and patients.

## **What's a day in the life of Dr. Perez?**

I get up early so I can speed walk on the treadmill for that little "me time" before the rush starts. I get my daughter off to school and head into work. My work day usually starts around 8, and I love my job. Every day is different. My work day is meetings, classes, presentations, mentorship, traveling, and administration. My brain is always on. In every activity, I am analyzing and evaluating to see if something can be done better or more efficiently or if there is a new project we can develop.

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

No, and that is one reason that my door is always open. I always answer calls and emails and feel an obligation to go out and find young bright minds and serve as mentor to whoever approaches me.

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

I didn't know the importance of finding mentors and how beneficial they could be. I really didn't understand the broad range of options I could have for my future.

**Is there a mentor that sticks out in particular for you? Who and why?**

My mother is my constant mentor. She hasn't lost sight in guiding her children through rough times in life, despite our age, and she is a true example of perseverance.

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

I didn't even consciously choose. I come from a disadvantaged population and it never occurred to me not to work with them or for them.

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

I have so many projects in the works, but I really enjoy working in the national arena and that's where I think my future is.

**Can you tell us some of the projects you are working on?**

The Clinical Conversational Spanish online course that I developed and patented was just recently approved by our School of Medicine's Curriculum Committee for elective credit, so I will start teaching a hybrid version in a few days. Along with HCOE faculty, we have developed an online Guided MCAT Study Program that we launched this spring and we are about to record our first online Hispanic Lecture Series.