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“Understanding and sharing our histories of resistance and struggle could lead to mutual learning and growth from our collective experiences and can unite our communities.”

*-Ralph Rivera Gutiérrez PhD
Member, MEDICC Board of Directors*

A Note from the CPHE Director

Happy New Year!

By Francisco J. Ronquillo

Program Director, Community Partnerships for Health Equity, MEDICC



Dear CPHE Network Friends & Colleagues, I want to thank you all for helping us keep this network moving forward with generous support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the Christopher Reynolds Foundation. Please note that we have a new electronic version for our CPHE Newsletter, thanks to our new MEDICC team member and colleague Sarah Coker. We hope you enjoy reading our CPHE updates from our trip to the “Island of Enchantment” – Puerto Rico– about all the individual CPHE happenings.

This new year that we are about to embark on will be full of new opportunities to continue our learning exchanges and support the work we are doing on the ground within our respective communities and as a collective.

Please note that **applications for our CPHE Mini-Grants are now open and due no later than Wednesday, January 31, 2024.** We encourage you to apply.

¡Los mejores deseos para este Año Nuevo 2024! Best wishes for this New Year 2024!

-Francisco

Reflections on CPHE Visit to Puerto Rico

CPHE Delegation Visits Puerto Rico– June 6-11

By Francisco J. Ronquillo
Program Director, Community Partnerships for Health Equity, MEDICC



CPHE

site members in Puerto Rico

In June 2023, MEDICC’s Community Health Partners (CPHE) program sent a delegation of 12 CPHE members from communities across the US to Puerto Rico for six days to learn from and exchange ideas with community-based organizations on the island. The delegation engaged in experiential learning excursions to various community-based organizations in Utuado, Bayamón, Caguas, San Juan and Adjuntas and discussed **meaningful community engagement, special considerations for the aging population, and the importance of involving youth in communities as drivers of social change.**

This year the CPHE leadership opted to send a delegation to Puerto Rico, USA in lieu of Cuba due to Cuba’s status of recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. The islands of Puerto Rico and Cuba have much in common. As neighboring islands in the Greater Antilles, both lie in the Caribbean between the southeastern United States and South America. They share similar climates, and both at various times were large sugar exporters to the US. Both share histories of indigenous Taíno presence and Spanish colonization in the 15th century, the latter leading to both islands sharing the Spanish language and Catholic religion, among other religions and spiritual practices. Both have played key roles in the history of the Americas.

People in Puerto Rico are legally and politically connected to the U.S. As claimed citizens, Puerto Ricans have a lot to teach us from their experience in the Caribbean, their emergency preparedness practices and their sustainable efforts around climate change.

CPHE Site Updates

From Louisiana to Puerto Rico: Lessons learned in community resistance

By Jamilah Peters-Muhammad
CPHE New Orleans, Louisiana Site

Two New Orleans, Louisiana [NOLA] CPHE team members were blessed to be on a very enlightening journey across the part of Puerto Rico that the tourists don't see, and where the impact of global warming and climate change is having an impact on the island. I was most impressed by the do-it-myself nature and resilience of the people and communities we visited. In every instance, community leaders self-identified the major issues in their communities and did not wait for, nor invite the bureaucracy of "our" US government to stop their work.

From our first community of Cossao, Utuado where the community took charge of their wellness by establishing a primary health clinic, we saw that not only do they provide healthcare, but they are providing jobs to keep the community economically viable and to keep the youth in their community. We saw that PEOPLE ARE THE POWER! This mantra ran through each site visit.

Next, we visited Granaderos del Cielo, Bayamón where a faith-based volunteer community organization responded to the needs of their community on a property they have now purchased through philanthropic gifts and grants. This has further established their long-term commitment to service in this vulnerable community.

Centro de Apoyo Mutuo Las Carolinas, Caguas again showed us the power of the it-needs-to-be-done-so-let's-"just do it." As in many places in Puerto Rico, the community's once flourishing school system is being decimated and schools are closing as young families are relocating to areas that can offer them some economic stability, leaving the elders to fend for themselves. This community's women have come together to provide a vital link to nutrition "necessary for the wellbeing of souls, stomachs, and culture."

Our last site visit was to a community that in many ways mirrors my home in New Orleans. In both communities the ravages of redevelopment that does not consider the impact on the people, the land, and the culture of a community elders, and the resulting coastal erosion, have led a 30-year fight to maintain and preserve the community. Most striking was that as these elders are aging out of this activism, there are not youth waiting to continue the dream of the founders. Additionally, this community is being salivated over by developers who see its potential for their own economic gains.

Throughout our visit, I was impressed and empowered to come home to share the stories from the visionaries and pioneers I had met along the way. I saw so many similarities in the day-to-day struggles in our communities, especially communities of color here in New Orleans and Southeast Louisiana. In preparation for our CPHE site visit in October of 2024, I want to expand on these Puerto Rican stories and show how we in the CPHE NOLA community are not only being affected, but are fighting back to claim our communities, our cultures, and the right of our people to have an equitable say in our communities and to stay in our communities. We will visit the historic Treme neighborhood

and Congo Square to see what that neighborhood is doing to fight gentrification and erasure of the oldest African American community in our city. We will visit the Native American Houma community to see how the effects of costal erosion and minimalization have affected that community and what the Houma are doing to fight back. We will also look at the area previously known as cancer alley, now renamed death alley, to see how the petrochemical superpowers have created and continued the genocide of generations of its most vulnerable neighbors.

Lastly, what would any trip to New Orleans be without seeing our historic culture up-close. We will spend an evening with our Sistahs Making A Change, one of the recent CPHE mini-grant recipients. Sistahs was so inspired by the stories from the CPHE trip to Puerto Rico that they decided they wanted to see this beautiful gem of Puerto Rico] for themselves. In October, we took 14 Sistahs to visit the island on an 8-day cultural tour. We are so looking forward to a sharing and gleaning of ideas and knowledge that CPHE partners will bring to New Orleans.

In love and service,
Mama Jamilah

Contours ArteCalle Residency Creates a Transnational Community through Black Doll-making and HIV/AIDS Activism in Cuba

By Cindy García
South LA CPHE Site

[Contours ArteCalle](#) is a decolonial feminist digital publication that builds a transnational community among collaborators in the Americas. Supported by the University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing Services, the second edition highlights Black Dolls/Muñecas Negras and AIDS and HIV. With a generous grant from the AIDS Healthcare Foundation, contributors to the second edition of the magazine will travel to Cuba from the United States and Mexico to engage in an arts and activist residency with the magazine's contributors from Cuba in February of 2024.

The residency intends to build relationships among all contributors to the Black doll edition of the magazine. It also relies on the local knowledge, networks, and support of two distinct arts/activist projects in Cuba: La Casa Tomada mirArte, a project, led by Cultural Promoter Myrna Rosa Padrón Dickson, that supports an LGBTQ+ community and people with HIV/AIDS; and, La Muñeca Negra, a community Black doll-making project led by Margarita Montalvo and Maritza Montalvo. Syria González Corujo is helping to manage the activities along with many other Cubans who are working for the success of the gathering. As the relationship between La Casa Tomada mirArte and La Muñeca Negra grows, they plan to continue local collaborations that tie together HIV/AIDS and the mental health benefits of Black doll-making, aimed at people living with HIV/AIDS.

As a highlight of the residency, Dr. Cynthia Davis of Charles R. Drew University will present the international HIV/AIDS work she has done for decades with the Dolls of Hope Project. Myrna Dickson has organized several Cuban grassroots activists to present the work they have been doing with HIV/AIDS prevention and care.

Many in Cuba do not have the resources to be able to read Contours ArteCalle online. In response, contributors will present and perform the edition in the Coco Solo neighborhood of La Casa Tomada

mirArte. To experience the edition, the public is invited to participate in doll-making workshops, storytelling, doll exhibitions, and theatrical and dance performances. The editors of Contours ArteCalle, Yolanda Hester and Cindy García, hope that the residency will help establish long-lasting transnational partnerships among contributors and arts-activist networks in Cuba.

“Mission Accomplished: Charles R. Drew University of Medicine and Science Launches New Independent Medical School in South Los Angeles*”

By Cynthia Davis MPH DHL
Assistant Professor, College of Medicine and College of Science and Health
Charles R. Drew University of Medicine and Science
South LA CPHE Site

**This article was written for and first published in [In The Mean Time Men's Group, Inc.](#) 's Spring 2023 "Message Newsletter."*



Charles R. Drew University of Medicine and Science's July 2023 White Coat ceremony

On July 10, 2023, Charles R. Drew University of Medicine and Science (CDU) launched its independent medical school with a class of 60 medical students. This achievement had been a long time coming. Since 1981, CDU has been in partnership with the School of Medicine at UCLA to offer a joint Drew/UCLA undergraduate medical education MD degree program where medical students completed their first two years of education at UCLA and their last two years at CDU. With the opening of CDU's medical school on July 10, 2023, CDU is now operating its new medical school independent of the School of Medicine at UCLA and has established the first new medical school in South Los Angeles. The Mission Statement of CDU reads: "Charles R. Drew University is a private nonprofit student-centered University that is committed to cultivating culturally diverse health

professional leaders who are dedicated to social justice and health equity for underserved populations through outstanding education, research, clinical services and community engagement.”¹

CDU was established in 1966 as a direct result of the 1965 “Watts Rebellion”. A group of Black physicians who were members of the Charles Drew Medical Society, incorporated the University in August 1966 as the Charles Drew Postgraduate Medical School. Charles Drew Postgraduate Medical School partnered with the Los Angeles County Public Health Department in 1972 with the opening of Martin Luther King Jr., General Hospital.

Over the past fifty years, CDU has evolved into an academic institution and community resource which has worked tirelessly to improve the health and well-being of community residents of all racial/ethnic identities residing in South Los Angeles. Through CDU’s education, community service, training, and research programs, CDU has helped to establish health systems and infrastructure to address the numerous health disparities impacting medically under-resourced populations not only in South Los Angeles, but around the world.

CDU has a College of Medicine, School of Nursing and a College of Science and Health. During its’ 57-year history, CDU has graduated more than 600 physicians, 1,225 physician assistants, over 1,300 nursing professionals, including 950 family nurse practitioners, over 2,700 physician specialists through its sponsored residency programs and over 1,600 other health professionals.²

CDU is recognized as a “Minority-Serving Institution” by the Office of Civil Rights as well as a Historically Black Graduate Institution under the U.S Department of Education’s Title III B Program. CDU is also a member of the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities and the Thurgood Marshall College Fund.³ CDU does not have “HBCU” designation (e.g., Historically Black Colleges and Universities). HBCUs are institutions of higher education in the U.S. which were established before the Civil Rights Act of 1964 with the intention of primarily serving African Americans.⁴ However, CDU is one of only four historical Black Medical Schools in the U.S.: Meharry Medical College, Morehouse School of Medicine, Howard University College of Medicine and Charles R. Drew University of Medicine and Science.⁵

As a faculty member at CDU for the past 39 years and a parent of an African American physician, what is so significant about the launching of the new independent medical school and participating in its first “White Coat Ceremony” is that CDU Administrators have been working for decades in partnership with South Los Angeles community advocates, activists and community gatekeepers to establish an independent medical school in South Los Angeles. When I came to CDU in August, 1984, I was mentored by several of these community advocates, activists and faculty members including, Mrs. Lilliam Mobley, called the Mother of Watts, as well as Ms. Nola Carter, Ernie Smith, MD, Ernie Smith, PhD., Dr. Samuel Shacks, and Mrs. Mary Ashley, a registered nurse in the Department of Family Medicine since the early 80s. These CDU faculty and community advocates along with CDU Administrators and Board members worked tirelessly for decades to promote the development of an independent CDU operated medical school in South Los Angeles. Many of these community leaders and CDU faculty and Administrators have passed on, but their lifelong legacy and desire to see CDU operating as an independent medical school has come to fruition with the installation of this class of 60 new medical students who represent CDU’s medical education program’s inaugural Class of 2027.

White Coat Ceremonies (WCC) were established in the U.S. in the early 1990s with the first official WCC being held in 1993 at the Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons to

commemorate and acknowledge the “transition of students from the study of preclinical to clinical health sciences.”⁶ Additionally, the White Coat Ceremony brings entering medical school classes’ family members, the community-at large, medical school administrators and staff and other “well-wishers” together on a specific day to celebrate and acknowledge the hard work and dedication it takes to be accepted into medical school in the U.S. while pursuing a career in medicine. I went through the same ceremony in 2010 when my child, Maisha, participated in her White Coat Ceremony at U. C. San Francisco. It is a proud and joyous moment to be on stage with your child and helping them put on their “White Coat” as they start their medical education program.

At CDU on August 19, 2023, the University held its medical education Class of 2027 White Coat Ceremony. It was a very joyous occasion for numerous family members and friends who were in attendance to support their child and/or friend who was being recognized and installed as the inaugural CDU medical education Class of 2027. At the White Coat Ceremony there were families from all over the world dressed in their traditional dress from Africa, Asia, South and Central America, the Philippines and more regions of the world. CDU has one of the most diverse classes of medical students in the U.S. It was such a proud moment for all family members, friends and supporters of these young people who represent the future physician leaders in the medical profession who will be caring for and advocating for people of color to improve our quality of life for generations to come. Walking across the stage to receive their “White Coats” symbolized their entry into a world of academia in which for the next four years they will receive the best training, education, support, and guidance, to prepare them to work as well-educated, trained, and qualified physicians to serve the community and world-at-large. The White Coat Ceremony represents a “Milestone” in these students’ lives who have dedicated themselves and worked hard to maintain high academic standings in their fields of training to be able to demonstrate that they are now ready to begin a new journey in their quest to become compassionate, exemplary and highly trained “Physician Servants.”

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Resistance and Struggles Uniting Communities: Navajo Nation, Low-income Mexican Americans in Albuquerque, and Puerto Ricans

By Ralph Rivera Gutiérrez PhD
Member, MEDICC Board of Directors

As I have reflected on the week I spent visiting the Navajo Nation and Albuquerque in June, I inevitably think about the shared health equity issues faced by three distinct communities, the Navajo Nation, low-income Mexican Americans in Albuquerque, and Puerto Ricans on the Island. Despite differences in history, culture, and geographic location, these communities share common threads of hardship, which include socio-economic disparities and health inequities. However, they also share a powerful resistance and struggle for cultural and language preservation and for community empowerment.

All three of these communities grapple with significant socio-economic disparities. Economic opportunities are limited in the expansive Navajo Nation, leading to high unemployment rates and poverty levels. In Albuquerque, low-income Mexican Americans face similar challenges. Many live in low-income neighborhoods with limited access to quality education and healthcare. This, in turn, restricts their ability to break the cycle of poverty. Puerto Ricans face economic hardships of a different kind. The island of Puerto Rico, a colony of the U.S., has experienced a prolonged economic crisis, which has led to high unemployment and underemployment, and a very high cost of living.

Health inequities are another shared concern among these communities. The Navajo Nation grapples with limited access to nutritious food and healthcare facilities, and the prevalence of chronic health conditions, including diabetes and heart disease. These issues are compounded by inadequate infrastructure and the remoteness of many Navajo communities. Low-income Mexican Americans in Albuquerque similarly face health inequities. These disparities are often linked to poverty, as well as to limited access to nutritious food, healthcare and the prevalence of diseases such as obesity and diabetes. In the case of Puerto Ricans, the aftermath of Hurricane Maria in 2017 highlighted the lack of adequate healthcare infrastructure on the island. The disaster's impact exposed healthcare system vulnerabilities and raised concerns about unequal treatment of Puerto Ricans by the U.S. federal government.

Fortunately, another common thread in the experiences of these communities is that we share a powerful resistance and struggle for our cultural and language preservation and for community empowerment. The Navajo Nation has a rich cultural heritage, but it faces the challenge of maintaining traditions in the face of modernization and outside influences. However, strong efforts are made to preserve the Navajo language, arts, cultural ceremonies and traditional healers. Many low-income Mexican Americans in Albuquerque have strong ties to their Mexican heritage and they participate in cultural events, celebrate their traditions and have developed valuable community organizations to provide culturally competent health and human services programs to their population. We, Puerto Ricans also have a deep connection to our culture and language. The struggle for political recognition and self-determination has been a recurring theme for more than 160 years of Puerto Rican history and the quest for cultural and language preservation, and for community empowerment, continues today. While the Navajo Nation, low-income Mexican Americans in Albuquerque, and Puerto Ricans differ in our geographical locations, histories, and cultural backgrounds, we share a range of similar issues, including socio-economic disparities, health inequities, and the importance of cultural and language preservation, and struggles for community development and empowerment. Understanding and sharing our histories of resistance and struggle could lead to mutual learning and growth from our collective experiences and can unite our communities.

Announcements

Hello from the Pacific Northwest! A lapsed CPHE chapter reconstituted!

Hilda Yepes Contreras, Administrative Site Director Emeritus at Open Door Community Health



Centers in Crecent City, California and a group of colleagues, are excited to announce that they are re-constituting a CPHE chapter in their county. Ms. Yepes Contreras became a part of CPHE in 2010 through funding/collaboration through the state of California's Building Healthy Communities community change initiative. As the only participant left from the original group, she is excited to have a presence again.

In addition to her colleagues, Ms. Yepes Contreras has recruited:

- Amira Long, Program and Facility Manager at First5 Del Norte
- Denise Doyle Schnacker, True North Organizing
- Shelby Bodenstab, Director of Public Health Nursing for Del Norte County California
- Sarah Kerr, Vice President of Operations Northern Division/Open Door Community Health Centers

Ms. Yepes Contreras says “We collaborate on many projects and initiatives in our community with the ultimate goal [of having] everyone be healthy and safe. Right now, we are working on multiple projects together, one being Adverse Childhood Experiences Scale awareness and implementation.”

CPHE Mini Grants 2024: Applications OPEN

Thanks to the generosity of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the CPHE Mini-Grants, our seed mini-grants available specifically for our CPHE Network members are available again for 2024 to help fund and support community initiatives/projects addressing health equity, youth development, environmental and/or social justice issues.

These mini-grants can provide financial support between \$2,500-\$5,000 and up to \$10,000, contingent upon availability of funding. If you are interested in submitting a proposal, please let us know so that we can send you a Mini-Grant Application Packet. **The deadline to submit your packet is January 31, 2024.**

Look up your county’s health data with *County Health Rankings & Roadmaps*

County Health Rankings & Roadmaps (CHR&R), a program of the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute, provides data on community health by county throughout the U.S. in order to advance health equity and awareness of the myriad of factors that influence health.

Search your county

New MEDICC Staff: A Note from the Executive Director

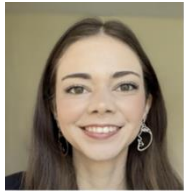
By C. William Keck MD MPH

I’m pleased to report that MEDICC hired two new staff members near the end of summer, 2023. Their presence is already improving MEDICC’s performance in important ways as the organization begins its comeback from the financial and operational difficulties imposed by the pandemic and the Trump administration. They are:

Megan Strom PhD is Program Director for MEDICC's Gateways Program. Dr. Strom's involvement in the world of healthcare started as a volunteer medical interpreter for numerous organizations. She has extensive experience teaching courses in Spanish at the university level including introductory and advanced Medical Spanish, focusing on how future healthcare providers can cultivate cultural humility and ensure language access for their patients. In 2018, Dr. Strom co-led a group of university students in the health professions on a short-term study abroad trip to Cuba. Dr. Strom's professional background is in Hispanic Linguistics where she has worked to promote more ethical and humane treatment of immigrants in the media. Her research focuses on how the media in Spanish and English represent unaccompanied Latinx child immigrants; COVID-19 in immigrant detention centers; and Violence Against Women (VAW), particularly detained immigrant women. She has given over 40 conference presentations on these topics and has published in journals like *Critical Discourse Studies*, *Discourse & Society*, and *Social Semiotics*.



Sarah Coker BA is MEDICC's Executive Assistant. She was previously on staff at the Center for Democracy in the Americas (CDA), where she advocated for U.S. policies toward Cuba based on engagement and mutual respect, and regional migration policies that promote safe, orderly, and humane migration in the Americas. Most recently, as Development and Communications Coordinator at CDA, she managed the organization's operations; supported development and communications; led the organization's diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives; and provided logistical assistance for regional delegation travel in the Americas, including Cuba.



Ms. Coker graduated with a BA in Spanish and a minor in Latin American and Latinx Studies from Skidmore College. She is currently an MSW student at Columbia University School of Social Work and is passionate about public health and health equity, particularly as it relates to mental health.

We are delighted to have two individuals with the backgrounds, skills, and passion for our work they possess as new members of the MEDICC team.

