

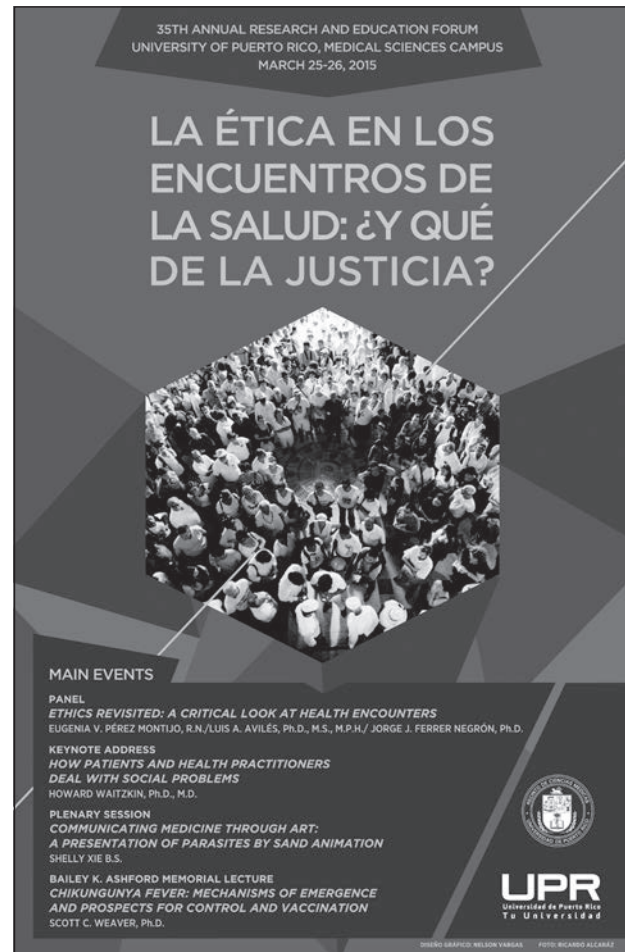
Ethics Revisited: A Critical Look at Health Encounters

Each spring students, faculty, residents and other professionals at the Medical Science Campus of the University of Puerto Rico come together to share their research projects at the Annual Research and Education Forum. The 2015 thirty-fifth edition of what is considered to be the Campus' most important annual event, kicked off with a discussion panel about the forum's theme: *Ethics Revisited: A Critical Look at Health Encounters*. Thought-provoking and challenging theoretical reflection, as well as testimony from those engaged in front-line care, appealed to many in the audience. For Chancellor Dr. Noel J. Aymat Santana, a critical look at the way interactions between people, their communities and health professionals evolve, invites us to consider philosophical and ethical debates that cannot disregard issues of social justice. To Dr. Ramón González, Dean of Academic Affairs and President of the Forum's Organizing Committee, this year's topic was particularly important because of the growing inequalities in health among the most vulnerable population groups in Puerto Rico. The conference took place on March 25th and 26th, 2015 in San Juan, Puerto Rico, with the participation of the schools that are part of the University of Puerto Rico Medical Sciences Campus: the School of Medicine, the School of Nursing, the School of Dental Medicine, the School of Pharmacy, the School of Health Professions and the Graduate School of Public Health; and other academic institutions from Puerto Rico and abroad. This year's edition was dedicated to the School of Nursing for its 75th Anniversary.

The conference aimed:

- to present the outcomes of research and educational projects
- to promote academic exchange between local, national and international scholars
- to increase the amount and quality of research and educational projects at the University of Puerto Rico Medical Sciences Campus
- to improve scientific writing and presentation skills of students, residents and junior faculty
- to identify potential future projects and collaborations
- to foster mentorship interactions of senior faculty with junior faculty and trainees

A rigorous evaluation by researchers and faculty at the Medical Sciences Campus, other campuses of the University of Puerto Rico and academic institutions in the Island, the United States and Latin America resulted in the selection of two hundred and twenty eight abstracts for poster and oral presentations. To encourage research into new and exciting directions, members of this year's Organizing Committee introduced the research category *Health and Policy Analysis*. Policy analysis is research with a specific objective to deal with a public problem related to health and the health sciences. It can

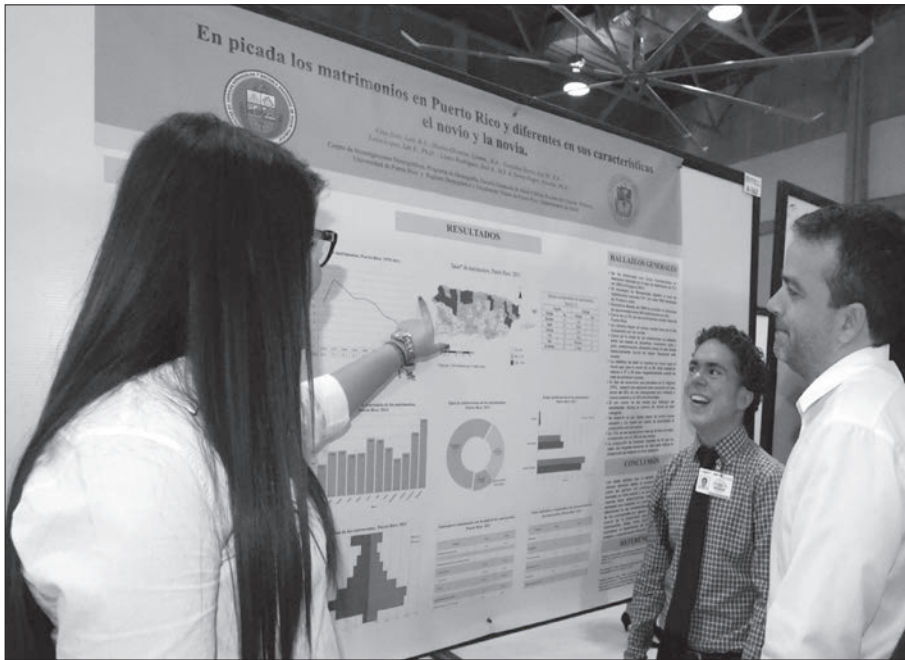


be conducted from a wide variety of academic disciplines, such as economics, political economy, history, sociology, geography, and ethics, among others.

Scientific Highlights

The discussion panel on day one was held by Professor Eugenia V. Pérez Montijo, Dr. Luis A. Avilés and Dr. Jorge J. Ferrer. Later, distinguished Professor from the University of New Mexico, Dr. Howard Waitzkin, addressed the contextual concerns that seep through the storytelling of patients that are at times interrupted or curtailed as they communicate with healthcare providers. In his keynote address, *How Patients and Health Practitioners Deal with Social Problems*, Waitzkin warned about how in doing this, doctors frequently reproduce dominant ideologies or control patients' behaviors. Later during the day the first Poster Session was presented.

On day two, the program consisted of eight Oral Sessions, a Poster Session, a Plenary and the traditional Bailey K. Ashford Memorial Lecture, organized by the School of Medicine. Shelly Xie, a medical student from the University of Texas,



Southwestern Medical Center, added to the lecture a humanistic dimension in her presentation *Communicating Medicine through Art: A Presentation of Parasites by Sand Animation*. With electrifying visual images that came to life in a sand box, Xie narrated the social impact of schistosomiasis and the experiences of people in poor countries who live with it. The forum ended with the theme, *Chikungunya Fever: Mechanisms of Emergence and Prospects for Control and Vaccination*, delivered by Dr. Scott C. Weaver, from the University of Texas where he is Professor at the Departments of Pathology and Microbiology & Immunology, Director of the Institute for Human Infections and Immunity, and Scientific Director at the Galveston National Laboratory.

During the Awards Ceremony the forum's organizers recognized the accomplishments of student researchers that excelled in the poster and oral presentations. On June 10, 2015, twenty eight award-winning researchers were selected in the categories of Applied Sciences, Basic Sciences, Case Reports, Clinical and Translational Research, Epidemiology and Health and Policy Analysis. The project *Lessons Obtained About Infectious, Chronic Diseases and Mental Health Issues in El Salvador: Exporting Health Concepts and Measures to International Sites*, by researcher Victor Emanuel Reyes Ortiz, and a group of health professionals and religious leaders from Puerto Rico and the United States, received the *Justice in Health Award*. This important prize, bestowed for the first time, recognizes projects that seek to transform the cultural, economic and political dynamics that cause and sustain health inequalities. Reyes presented an international health project in San Vicente, El Salvador, to assist health needs related to HIV/AIDS,

diabetes, cancer, violence, alcohol use and resiliency. His team used standardized and validated instruments but the results were rejected after they realized, through a debriefing exercise, that statistical data was senseless because it ignored contextual variables. Their evaluation exposed the need to use their quantitative measures in a framework that includes the social, political, and environmental dimensions of the community's reality. The Justice in Health Award was presented this year by Jocelyn Samuels, Director of the Office for Civil Rights at U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Following the conclusion of the event, the objective of identifying projects and collaborations was

immediately concretized as the Schools of Medicine, Nursing and Dental Medicine came together and organized a capacity building workshop with the forum's main speaker, Dr. Howard Waitzkin. With the theme *Challenges and Possibilities in Communicating with Patients*, fifteen faculty members and residents brushed up their skills in a hands-on experience that demonstrated that improved doctor-patient communication is both desirable and possible.

The 36th Annual Research and Education Forum will be held on March 25th and 26th, 2016.

Conclusions

The Annual Research and Education Forum keeps developing into new directions, maintaining its position as the most awaited academic annual event at the Medical Sciences Campus. Under the slogan *El Recinto de lo posible*, the Campus' leadership and the forum's creative and hard-working Organizing Committee implemented changes that will foster rigorous academic debates on crucial health issues, expand the disciplinary content of the topics in the scientific program, improve the quality and rigor of the research projects considered, foster new directions in policy research, expose the academic community to renown international scholars and simplify the submission, evaluation and communication processes.

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