

Podcast Episode 82

Educators discuss why more Hispanics should enter the healthcare workforce.

Part 2, featuring Dr. Sherry Segura.

Dr. Sherry Segura continues our exploration of Hispanic education and workforce diversity. Dr. Segura is CEO of the Foundation for Hispanic Education in San Jose, California, where she is deeply involved in community efforts to ensure high quality and innovative educational services are available to all students. As she observes, Hispanic families may have more limited access to healthcare and this limits their exposure to the myriad of opportunities in the medical field as a potential career, not just doctors and nurses. Hispanic families may also be daunted by how expensive a healthcare education path is perceived to be, and be unaware of the support opportunities to offset costs that do exist. Dr. Segura discusses some initiatives that break down these barriers, and explores the role of parents and community stakeholders in increasing healthcare workforce diversity, and encourages people from all facets of the medical field to visit schools and be prepared to be role models. Hosted by Dr. Ramon Jimenez, orthopedic surgeon.

Dr. Jimenez: Welcome to the Health Disparities Podcast produced by Movement is Life.

My name is Ramon Jimenez. I am an orthopedic surgeon who has been involved in mentoring and reducing musculoskeletal healthcare disparities for our marginalized Hispanic population for a few years. I also serve on the steering committee of Movement is Life. We hope you're doing well, as winter brings us more pandemic concerns across the whole nation. The youngest in our communities are likely to be experiencing the pandemic

differently from those of us with more years and more responsibilities. First start, young children tend to accept the circumstances they find themselves in as normal. Whereas, the rest of us perceive what is going on as a great and unwelcome upheaval. And of course, that is not the only so-called normal. There is also the endurance reality of inequality and inequity that is often left unquestioned, often accepted as just the way things are, or it is what it is. I'm sure my guest today in the second in a series of podcasts looking at Hispanic education and healthcare workforce diversity will most certainly say that the way things are is not the way things have to be. And indeed, she would not want our children to think that a career in health sciences is something only other people do.

Dr. Sherry Segura is the CEO of the Foundation for Hispanic Education.

She has more than 22 years of education experience and is a proud product of the California public school system. She served as a middle school, Language Arts, English Language development and reading intervention teacher. She spent seven years as an instructional coach supporting teachers in growing and developing their professional craft.

She was a successful early childhood elementary and K-through-8 school administrator in Colorado and California. She is committed to providing all students with a rigorous high-quality education coupled with enrichment opportunities to ensure post-secondary success. Her unique experience of teaching, coaching and overseeing preschool, elementary, middle school, high school, undergraduate, graduate and doctoral students is pivotal to

understanding the entire academic trajectory. Dr. Segura served as an adjunct professor in the Morgridge College of Education at the University of Denver, and is currently an adjunct professor in the school of education and psychology at Santa Clara University. She was the chief academic officer at the Foundation for Hispanic Education prior to becoming the chief executive officer of all school.

Dr. Segura welcome to the Health Disparities Podcast. We appreciate all the great work you've been doing. And once again, we're looking forward to discussing how all this intersects with the goal of increasing healthcare workforce diversity and why that is so important.

Dr. Segura: Thank you so much for having me. I really appreciate the opportunity. Dr. Jimenez, you've given us an opportunity to really unpack some of this work and how we can better serve and get more of our kiddos to see healthcare as an option.

Dr. Jimenez: Great. Did I miss anything regarding your background that you might like our listeners to know about?

Dr. Segura: As far as my professional background, I think you covered it. I realized that I'm much older than I feel sometimes when those things are laid out like that. But I do what I do because, I knew very young that I had a

passion for education. I loved the classroom. I loved all things, learning and academia, and I'm very fortunate that I get to serve in this capacity. So, thank you.

Dr. Jimenez: Thank you. Why are more students not pursuing careers in health scientists? What do you see as the obstacles?

Dr. Segura: In talking to students, in listening to students, being in classrooms that I see, one of the biggest ones really is exposure. A lot of our students may have some familiarity with the medical field, maybe they do a sports physical and they interact with a physician. Or perhaps they have a loved one, or they personally have had experience with a doctor in a medical emergency that kind of situation. But I think sometimes in our particular demographic, the lack of access to healthcare can often, really impede, knowing all of the vast opportunities that healthcare and the field of medicine have to offer. So, there's a lot more that are preventative in nature. And I think that oftentimes they just don't know that those positions exist or that those fields are fields of opportunity.

Dr. Jimenez: Can you name three or four solutions to circumvent these barriers or obstacles?

Dr. Segura: Again, exposure to the medical field is really important. I think things like a career day where not just a doctor perhaps or a nurse, but maybe someone that's in biomedicine or someone who is in a different area that's not as obvious to those who don't have access and don't know or don't have a lot of people in the medical field, in their immediate family. I think that's interesting. It's, something new that we can talk to kids about. I really think exposure to the medical field as a whole and opportunities is important.

Dr. Jimenez: I do know that you, in your role as CEO, you're also very community minded. How important is the support or non-support of parents in encouraging or discouraging their students from pursuing healthcare careers?

Dr. Segura: I don't see necessarily that parents would discourage them from going into the medical field. Again, I feel like it potentially is just maybe, not having access to all of what's available in the medical field. I believe that education about opportunities is important, not only for the students, but for the families as well, so they can have a better understanding. There's a perception that you have to be fantastic at math and science. And if maybe those aren't your strongest areas then maybe it's not for you. There's a lot of other areas in the medical field that maybe are very well suited for someone whose strengths are in the humanities. There's the

people part of medicine. And, also the perception I know from the families, oftentimes it's the perception that it's just going to be too expensive and it's not an option because of cost. I hear that from families as well. And so, it comes down to the education part, understanding that there's a lot of pathways to get there. There's, a lot of options. There's a way to get a position that maybe will help you support the next level of education towards that ultimate job that may have some cost associated, but it's not out of the question.

Dr. Jimenez: Do you believe that parents think simply that the opportunities are available is my daughter, is my son can become a doctor or nurse. And they don't see the steps in between and the other career pathways that could be chosen in order to end up with gainful employment, end up doing things. They're just simply over simplifying the whole view.

Dr. Segura: I think it depends on knowing that there's, a whole host of opportunity within the field. And that there are other pathways that maybe you don't want to be a doctor, but maybe there's another area within the medical field that really is more interesting to you. I think it depends on the person, depends on the family. But I do think there's a perception that it's very expensive. And that, it has to be, this 10-year, 12-year, however long, thing. I didn't just jump into CEO. I became a teacher first and then I became a principal. There are these different ways to get there. And I

think that sometimes that understanding makes it feel more doable. In our field, we have a hard time getting teachers and, in many areas, we have teacher shortages as well. So, I think that they, there's more exposure and we don't have as much of a shortage as we have now, in healthcare. But I think it comes down to interest. The students, what are they interested in? What are their strengths in? And then being able to allow them to explore. Same with education, it's not just teaching there's other fields, there's counseling, there's mental health services or social work. There's a lot attached to that. And so, I think again, it comes down to really students having the opportunity to explore what's interesting. Where they feel strong, where they feel passionate and then allowing them some opportunities to shadow or to have people come in and talk to them about what that looks like. But at 14 years old or 15 years old, they're not sure. And they just need exposure to know really what's out there, not just what's in their immediate neighborhood.

What we do at our organization currently is, really giving students the access or exploring a strength finder. Gallup makes one that we're going to be implementing for the next school year. So, making sure that they find out what exactly are your strengths. And I know that in the past, myself included, we took a survey, I think it was part of the counseling department and it said, you should be in this field or that field. We don't want to limit in that way. We want to know what kids' strengths are. Where

are you strong? And then where are the areas that you can explore that would be, a really, great fit for these strengths. Also, school counselors, they work individually with our students. They come up with individualized plans for them to make sure that academically they're taking courses that are going to count towards their, A-through-G requirements. So that they're able to go to the universities that they want at the end of their four years. Typically, we have done what, a lot of other high schools have used and it more kind of designates, a career that you might be a good fit for, but this one is more strength-based and that is why we opted to go this way. So, we can really start and work from a student's strength perspective, and not, some survey tells you that you'd be good, as a pilot. And so, all you pursue is being a pilot because you think that's what you're supposed to do. We're looking at what are your strengths and then what are the multitude of opportunities that you can explore while you're with us for four years?

Dr. Jimenez: That's great. That's very smart of you and the school to choose something like that for our kids.

Dr. Segura: We do have the opportunity for kids to explore orthopedics with our Sawbones Workshop, that's very interesting, exciting for kids. They're able to see, what do bones look like? What does surgery with bones look like? And practice and that's really fun. They get to talk to physicians that come

in and learn more about that particular field of study. Career day is another way we try to bring in not only physicians, but nurses. We've brought in social workers, we've brought in mental health providers. But really just a multitude of folks from the medical community. We have a partnership with Kaiser and they also offer workshops that our students have been able to participate in. We have a lot of students currently that really kind of self-identify as they already know I'm interested in medicine. We really leverage those kiddos at Latino College Preparatory Academy to host a blood drive for the community every year. That's really exciting to get to work with, the folks from the American Red Cross in setting it up. Talking to the community, inviting the community Genentech, they have field experience. Genentech does a wonderful job of the biotechnology field of study. They give them access to all the different departments within their organization. Kids really love that. They're excited to explore new things when they get back. And that's where we have really had success and things, to encourage kids to explore more.

Dr. Jimenez: In career day and stuff, I'm sure that if you bring an attorney and the attorney may explain about paralegal. It's a career that can give a gainful employment and satisfaction, and is more attainable than going to get your bachelors and then going to law school. It cuts the time short, cuts the expense short. So, hopefully the attorneys whoever comes in tries to mention that. I know, I gave a talk at a career day and I really tried to

emphasize to them because as soon as they asked the question was, how many years does it take you after high school to become an orthopedic surgeon? And I almost hesitated from giving them the number because the number is so daunting. It's 13, 15 years or something like that. And so, I try to tell them, their steps. You just think of community college or four-year college, and then there's medical school. Once you achieve one step, just step by step. It's just so much easier. It's like the beginning of a marathon is the first hundred yards or something like that.

Dr. Segura: So, the way that I explain it is basically by what does each degree get you? Because I think that that's very concrete for kids to understand, with a two-year degree, you can be a para-professional, you can be a teacher aide, but that gets you X amount of money. And you can do that while you go to school and get your four-year plus your teaching credential, which is five years, but you get double the money and here's how much it is. And then, if you go and you decide to be a principal and you get your additional two years in certification, now that's this amount. So, we've talked about it in terms of a longer-term plan. I think even if you were to be a para-professional, I think that's an absolutely respectable job, but if you have a four-year degree, it's much better. And, it yields a much bigger profit. So, one doesn't eliminate the things to come. It's just part of that trajectory.

Dr. Jimenez: No, that's great. That also is a selling point or a motivating point for parents, to think that, "Oh." So, they are going to be able to bring money in to contribute to the family pot, if you would. And, they are being productive as opposed to just going to school and not being productive if you would. So once a student identifies medical career experiences, we're talking about trying to increase or decrease the disparity in the healthcare workforce. So, once they identify a medical career preference, what happens next?

Dr. Segura: Our counselors meet one-on-one always with students, they meet throughout this school year. They develop a plan for them. So, they're making sure that they have the coursework necessary not only to be A-through-G ready, but also that they have the opportunity to potentially take the correct coursework that can support having what they need when they get there. So, if I don't know, advanced placement coursework is appropriate. They'll register for those courses. In advanced placement, we have advanced placement calculus. We have advanced placement science courses. Those are typically some of what we offer. We may be able to offer some elective coursework towards a degree through our dual enrollment program with San Jose City, Evergreen Community College. But we sit down and look at their interests specifically and try to get them the coursework that will benefit them in getting into the college that they want the most.

Dr. Jimenez: How about cultivating students who are bilingual and bi-literate. The United States itself, or California is about 52%, 54% Hispanic, Latino. And so, I think that plays some importance. What do you think?

Dr. Segura: Absolutely. We are so lucky to have so many bilingual students, and while they're with us, we want to continue to develop their linguistic skills in Spanish. And so, our advanced placement Spanish courses are very popular. We have a very high percentage of students who pass that and we'll be able to use that coursework as college credits.

We also have quite a few students, and it varies, year to year, but we have quite a few students who graduate with the seal of bi-literacy. That is absolutely something that colleges look for and really, want in a student, it gives our kiddos a leg up, if you will. And some other students who, all things, equal they're fully bi-literate.

Dr. Jimenez: I was born and raised in San Jose and my parents were from Mexico and they stress education and they stress assimilation. So, I think parents who just do that and stop there are running the risk that their students will lose their language or first language, if you would because I spoke mainly Spanish by the time I went to kindergarten. But, after that obviously it changed, but my parents, I think we're very smart in hammering into me

that do not forget Spanish, the language and do not forget your Hispanic culture. Do you find that occurs with our student population?

Dr. Segura: I do not. Not as much as it happens, I would say in other places. Part of what makes, the Foundation for Hispanic Education, such a unique place is that we really celebrate our culture. We have the arts that really celebrate our culture. We don't have ballet, but we have Aztec dancing and Folklorico. We have enrichment opportunities after school with mariachi. And so, it's a celebration of culture. Linguistically, a lot of our students participate in advanced courses so they can continue to keep their Spanish at a very academic level, which is, I think beautiful. And, our families often seek us out because of that. They do want their children to celebrate their culture. And so, I think in our space, it's unique to us that they are able to do so.

Dr. Jimenez: Wonderful. So, let me ask you a question about instructional focus. Are there specific programs or actions that you take in order to present these students who might be interested in a life career in healthcare, more focus or a higher depth of knowledge questioning, etc.?

Dr. Segura: Sure. Well, I think, the best thing we can do to prepare those students, to go in to the medical field or really any field of their choosing is to really focus on very rigorous, academic curriculum, the instructional process.

Make sure that they have access to high level thinking, collaboration, those kinds of things. So, we really, we've adopted all research-based high-quality curriculum for the classrooms, very eco-friendly. So that they have continuous practice and they get really good at the technology part which is very critical when you go to college, access to advanced placement courses. Again, those are nationally normed classes. You're really competing nationally, not just with an area that you live in, and those are very, very rigorous. I see the level of work that goes on in there and it's just incredible that level of rigor that they're exposed to. I think that's really important because we do want kids to be fully prepared when they get to college. We also give them access to college coursework through the community college. They get to participate in college courses with college professors, in their four-year time with us and they get to experience what that feels like, which is great. And, cultivating students that are bilingual making sure that they continue and that they are fully bilingual and they get that seal of bi-literacy. So, as far as people looking to hire or to hire them, first of all. And then also, to go into a program in a university is really, really, highly sought after. And our instructional focus, always really those high levels of thinking, high levels of discourse and conversation and collaboration with peers, project-based learning. Those kinds of things, giving them the opportunities of all of those things that we experienced in college.

Dr. Jimenez: Thank you, Dr. Segura. And that's the final question. Is there anything that we did not cover that you'd like to mention before we close?

Dr. Segura: Well, I would just like to really, ask the medical field and people that are in it really when there's an opportunity in your community to go to a community event a career day, somewhere where schools are located, I think it's really essential for kids to hear from people who are in different fields that they may not ever have heard from before. I think a lot more kids would be really wanting to go into the medical field if they really understood all of the different areas that they could be in the medical field and be a part of. I think that definitely the medical field will yield more kids going into that.

Dr. Jimenez: For healthcare professionals, for doctors, being a role model is so important and sometimes, they don't want to volunteer at the time or what have you for many, many reasons. But your point is very well taken that should be done at every opportunity. So, our time is up, but I know we could have discussed this more and I hope we can reconvene, in the future.

Dr. Segura: Thank you so much. This was great and wonderful conversation. Thank you.

Dr. Jimenez: Thank you our listeners for joining us today. Subscribe to the podcast on iTunes or Spotify. So, stay safe, stay smart. Be well. It's goodbye from San Jose. Thank you.

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