

# Humans of CDI

Ernesto Gonzalez-Martinez, MD

Dermatologist, Massachusetts General Hospital

Professor of Dermatology, Harvard Medical School



**The impact of Dr. Ernesto Gonzalez-Martinez cannot be understated.**

Originally from Aguadilla, Puerto Rico, **Dr. Ernesto Gonzalez** was recruited as a faculty member for Harvard Medical School and was named the first Director of the Phototherapy Unit of the Massachusetts General Hospital in 1976, becoming a pioneer in the investigation and application of photochemotherapy (PUVA) to treat psoriasis and other dermatologic disorders.

During his tenure, Dr. Gonzalez has advanced the careers of our UiM community through various initiatives, including founding and serving as Director of the Hispanic Medical Students Mentorship Program, a cross-cultural, cross-institutional mentorship program for Hispanic students attending the four medical schools in Massachusetts.

In recognition of his outstanding service to the Hispanic community, in 2005, MGH announced the Ernesto Gonzalez Award in perpetuity with the annual selection of other employees that deserve such recognition. More recently, the American Academy of Dermatology has recognized his efforts with The Presidential Citation, the highest award endowed by the Academy, on three different occasions (2010, 2019, 2022) for his efforts on behalf of underserved communities in Puerto Rico, Honduras and with the homeless population in Boston.

For a full bio, please refer to Dr. Gonzalez bio sketch, or [click here to read his bio on the MGH website](#).

**To learn more about Dr. Gonzalez and his legendary achievements, keep reading.**

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## **What don't people know about you? What would people be surprised to learn about you?**

- 1) I am the longest Spanish physician employee at the MGH.
- 2) I am the second Spanish tenured professor in the history of Harvard Medical School.
- 3) The Ernesto Gonzalez Award for Outstanding Services to the Hispanic Community was established, in perpetuity in 2005 and many employees of the MGH have received this recognition and reward during the past 17 years.
- 4) I was Associate Director of the Multicultural Affairs, presently the CDI, for over 10 years.
- 5) I was a pioneer in the development of several clinical enterprises in dermatology such as phototherapy, lasers, teledermatology, contact allergies and services to the homeless population in Boston

## **How has this institution changed since you arrived?**

The MGH has changed dramatically its culture since 1996 when Dr. James Mongan, the late President of the MGH, grouped a small number of members of the institution, called the Diversity Committee, to develop a comprehensive program to address this need. I was a member of the group and proud of its accomplishments. The Multicultural Affairs Office (MAO), presently re-named the CDI, benefitted greatly from the support provided by the new policies established under the new governance.

## **When you started at MGH, what did you hope for or envision for your time here that's come true? What's surprised you? What were you hoping for that hasn't happened yet?**

When I began working at the MGH in 1976, I experienced a pervasive discrimination against many underserved groups-I remember being told by one of the leaders of the institution "not to speak in Spanish when walking through the halls of

the institution.” James Mongan, as he became President of the MGH, was very much aware of our institutional behavior and referred to the MGH as “one of the most elitist organizations he has known.” He promised change and he delivered. I consider myself one of the pioneers of that change. We need to be vigilant that this cultural, dramatic change continues, as there are structural and systemic divergent forces remaining. Even though an SVP of Diversity, Inclusion and Equity was appointed, and it’s disappointing to see him go, we must learn, be accountable, and continue making the incremental steps that are critical to structural change, so that we can continue to elevate other member(s) of our community to a position of power where they can provide valuable contributions.

**Do you have a favorite quote?**

I was told by one of my esteemed professors that the best indicator of success is to follow up, promptly and efficiently, with any important task in your life. Do not procrastinate and be responsive. I do my best to follow up on that dictum.

**Tell us about your heritage. How does your heritage influence your work?**

I was born in extreme poverty in Puerto Rico from a single mother working as a maid and suffering significant discrimination because my mother was black, poor and with no formal academic education. She was my most significant mentor with her dignified demeanor, love and emphasis in education. Her inspiration and aspirations were reflective to attain my goals as an accomplished professional with a profound sense of social responsibility.