

Clinical Research Training Program Fellow 2008-2009

National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI), National Institutes of Health (NIH)  
4<sup>TH</sup> Year Medical Student, Mount Sinai School of Medicine, New York, NY

B.A.-Economics, Tufts University

Hometown: Sparta, NJ

My name is Edward Vazquez, and I participated in the 2008-2009 Clinical Research Training Program (CRTP). I grew up in northern New Jersey, completed my undergraduate degree from Tufts University in 2002, and I am now a 4<sup>th</sup> year student medical student at the Mount Sinai School of Medicine.

In the middle of my third year of medical school, I expressed my interest in pursuing a year-long clinical research experience to my research dean. Of the options she mentioned, I was most interested in the CRTP and the opportunity to work in a clinical research setting at the National Institutes of Health (NIH). She spoke highly of the program and suggested that I contact previous CRTP fellows from my school so I could get more details about their personal experiences in this program. Everyone I talked to seemed to agree that the CRTP would be the best opportunity to fulfill my goal of participating in a deeply enriching research experience with a clinical emphasis.

Up to that point, my experience on the medical wards helped shape this strong interest. I was particularly fascinated by cardiovascular disease, and also admired the research efforts of clinician-scientists in this arena at my home institution. I had always been interested and involved in research even prior to medical school, but the cardiovascular sector was something new and exciting for me. I liked that the CRTP allowed for an extended period to visit labs and meet with potential mentors and felt this would help me find a cardiovascular project I would enjoy.

After a few weeks of exploring the research opportunities at the NIH campus, I decided to work with Dr. Richard Cannon of the Translational Medicine Branch in the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI). At the time, Dr. Cannon's group was in the early stages of a clinical trial called "Keep the Beat II," which was a randomized controlled trial looking at the cardiovascular effects of a worksite wellness program held at the NIH for sedentary employees. Several biomarkers were to be assessed in this cohort, including changes in insulin resistance, adiposity, endothelial function, and lipid metabolism. My specific role in the lab was to analyze lipoproteins, particularly the quality of high density lipoprotein (HDL) and its association with the aforementioned biomarkers. We sought to get a better understanding of the functional properties of HDL and how they related to risks for atherosclerosis. We believed that qualitative measures, as opposed to the conventionally tested quantitative measures of HDL, would give us better insight into cardiovascular risk in this cohort. I had an invaluable experience in this lab, particularly because of the amazing working relationship I had with my CRTP mentor.

He understood my goals for the year and made sure he did everything in his power to help me achieve them. Surely the NIH is filled with notable and accomplished scientists, but more importantly for a young researcher, many of them are also outstanding mentors. I believe other fellows in my CRTP class would echo this sentiment.

Aside from responsibilities in lab, I really enjoyed the other opportunities the CRTP afforded. This included clinical teaching rounds that were led by some of the most distinguished physicians at the NIH. The CRTP Clinical Research Seminar and Journal Club meetings gave us the opportunity to learn the essential principles of clinical research while reviewing interesting articles selected by the fellows (not to mention a great time to spend with the whole group and enjoy a nice meal!). Several events over the course of the year, such as the Clinical Investigator Student Trainee Forum and the trip to the Pfizer headquarters in Connecticut were also highlights. Just as important as the formalities of the program were the fun times we shared outside of lab! Bethesda is a beautiful town with many restaurants, parks, theatres, and shops. More so, it is very close to the popular area of Northwest DC, and many of us took advantage of exploring the city throughout the year. The political subculture was something new and intriguing for me to be a part of, especially during an election year of monumental proportions.

My year with the CRTP solidified my aspirations of a career as a clinician-scientist. I learned so much, yet only scratched the surface in terms of knowledge base. I truly believe this experience will make me a better physician let alone researcher. I can see myself eventually returning to the NIH and following the same path of my mentor and others who have inspired me during the year. I encourage any incoming CRTP fellow to undertake his/her research year with an open mind and to absorb as much as possible. It is a unique opportunity to be a part of an institution which is second to none, and the program year moves quickly so I would strongly encourage participants to take advantage of all of the educational benefits and activities that come along with being a CRTP fellow! If you do, I think you will agree the CRTP will be a highlight of your career.

## **Approval of Success Story Profile**

I agree to participate in this program by having my photo as well as my experiences as a trainee in the intramural program at the NIH portrayed on the web site.

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Signature

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Date