Global Health

An Interview with Eric Cioè-Peña, MD, MPH, FACEP, Founding Director, Center for Global Health, Northwell Health

EDITORS' NOTE *Dr. Eric Cioè-Peña is the founding director of Northwell Health's Center for Global Health (CGH). He is an Assistant Professor of Emergency Medicine as well as the American College of Emergency Physicians' lead ambassador to El Salvador. He has worked in Botswana, Dominican Republic and El Salvador on health system development projects, trauma care and humanitarian assistance following the 2010 Haiti earthquake. He is currently leading an initiative to unify and consolidate global health programming to be integrated and horizontally focused through CGH. Dr. Cioè-Peña earned his MD from the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine and MPH in humanitarian assistance through Columbia University.*

Dr. Eric Cioè-Peña

Will you provide an overview of your role and areas of focus?

I am an emergency physician, first and foremost, and am also Northwell Health Systems' Director for Global Health. I founded the Center for Global Health in 2019 and the Center began operating in 2020.

What was the vision for creating the Center for Global Health and how do you define its purpose?

When I came into the global health environment in 2018 at Northwell and did a stakeholder analysis and needs assessment, we found that Northwell had about 34 different programs going on concurrently in approximately 28 different countries. We had mixed levels of involvement and commitment on behalf of the health system with some programs having little presence of our people on site with our partners even though Northwell had a major emphasis and focus on global health activities. It became obvious that there was a need for centralized coordination, a narrowing of the focus, and a redirection of the people who had great interest and energy for the work in order to allow them to participate in something that would have impact and had a clear expectation for results. This became the impetus for creating the Center for Global Health.

Will you highlight the impact of the Center since its founding?

I am very proud of where we are with the Center for Global Health, especially since as I mentioned our first year of operation was in 2020 which was a very difficult time to start a global health program. We were able to adapt to the challenges caused by COVID and were able to quickly switch to telemedicine to continue to support our programs around the world. I am so impressed by how our faculty and staff were able to adapt and perform during this time which is a testament to the strength and resilience of our team.

Is the focus for the Center about increasing its number of programs or is it about continuing to build on the programs it is already working on?

We definitely have to be selective, and it is about doing things well where we engage our partners fully and are able to create a model that we can share with other health systems that may want to get engaged in global health. We need to recognize at Northwell that we cannot take on every need and it is about doing everything we can in the best way possible and trying to bring other industry leaders on board in these global health efforts. An example is in Ukraine with telemedicine. Northwell was the first health system in the United States to start telemedicine in Ukraine working with military hospitals and civilian hospitals. There is going to continue to be an upswell in need and Northwell on its own will not be able to meet the needs of every hospital and health center in Ukraine. Our idea is to write the playbook which we can share with our colleague health systems since it will take our combined efforts in working together to have a chance to meet these growing needs.

Will you discuss Northwell Health's commitment to take on challenging global issues and to being a force for good in society?

It is one of the reasons why I love working for Northwell Health. It is a place that is committed to doing the right thing which is what I believe sets Northwell's culture apart from other health systems. If you just look at the example of what we are doing in Ukraine, this was not on our radar before February 2022, but when the situation in the country changed, our CEO called to ask what we could do to help and what options were available to give our support since it was the right thing to do. This is what a global citizen does in times of crisis.

How valuable is it in leading the Center for Global Health to have such deep engagement and commitment from Northwell's CEO, Michael Dowling, and its leadership team for the Center's work?

This is literally the difference between success and failure. Having leadership that is supportive and understands the big picture and that innovating in this space takes time is critical to success. If you look at our Raising Health campaign, I believe that there is nothing that captures the meaning of Raising Health more than Global Health. We do this work because it is central to our culture, values and mission and is of importance to our physicians and team members.

What advice do you offer to young people interested in a career in medicine?

The right reason to go into medicine is that you are fascinated by an aspect of the job and you could not imagine doing anything else. People are drawn to this profession because of the connection it allows them to have with another person and the ability to impact another person's life in a major way. I am working an ER shift later this week and I will be in the critical care ER for a 12-hour shift. On multiple times during that shift, I will meet someone on either the greatest day of their life or on the worst day of their life. For me, it is another day at work, but for my patients, it is a life-changing day in their world. It is an incredible privilege that you are given as a healthcare worker to be in a person's life at this critical time. These have been strenuous times for healthcare workers, but they are also strenuous times for patients and families, and we need to be mindful of that as we do our work. ●

> **"Northwell was the first health system in the United States to start telemedicine in Ukraine working with military hospitals and civilian hospitals."**