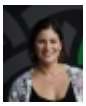
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Being a Scientist: The joy of creating and spreading knowledge [1]

Subm :011 - 12:00am





[3]

Simposio de CienciaPR: Quiero ser científico… ¿y ahora qué hago?

Understanding the world around them. This is what motivates thousands of people, in Puerto Rico and around the world, to do science. The great patriot and educator Eugenio María de Hostos [4] once said: "Science is the presentation of each and every one of the efforts of understanding."

Through history, science has been a key element in one of the most fundamental quests of humanity: the generation of knowledge to understand the world around us. It could be said that science makes us humans. After all, scientific questions stem from curiosity, a quality we all share.

Understanding comes from knowledge, but for that knowledge to give way to the understanding of something, it needs to be communicated. An essential part of science is to share the results of research with fellow scientists. Equally important is that scientists communicate the significance and impact of their discoveries to the public and their communities.

The unethical behavior of physician Cornelius Rhoads', who in a now infamous letter [5] stated he had injected some of his Puerto Rican patients with cancer cells, because they were "lazy and dirty"; and the clinical trials for the contraceptive pill [6], done in Puerto Rican women who were mostly illiterate and unaware of the fact that they were being part of a clinical trial. Both cases provide historical examples that underscore the importance and the need for a scientific community that is actively involved in the scientific education of their people. As we reflect on these cases, occurred at the beginning of the 20th century, one can't help to wonder if history would have been different had there been a Puerto Rican scientific community to (1) question the ethical framework of the studies being done by Dr. Cornelius Rhoads and Dr. Gregory Pincus [7] (who created pill); and (2) to educate Puerto Ricans on the possible consequences and side effects of the studies the were being part of. While it is true that social and political factors played a role in these situations, it becomes evident that a dialogue between scientists and their communities is necessary when it comes to understanding the impact of science in health and every day life.

Fortunately, today Puerto Rico has a scientific community that is committed with the education and well being of their country. That commitment is reflected on this website, CienciaPR.org [8]. During the last five years, scientists and members of our community have been key in Ciencia Puerto Rico's multiple initiatives to promote science, research and scientific literacy in Puerto Rico. And of course, our dedicated team of volunteers, who are the driving force of our organization.

Recently, as part of Ciencia Puerto Rico's fifth anniversary and in the context of Biosciences Week 2011, the commitment of the Puerto Rican scientific community with the education of their country was evidenced by the publication of the book *¡Ciencia Boricua! Ensayos y anécdotas del científico puertorro* [9] *(Boricua Science! Essays and anecdotes from the Puerto Rican scientist).*

The idea for *¡Ciencia Boricua!* was born from one of Ciencia Puerto Rico's most successful initiatives, a collaboration with El Nuevo Día [10]. Since 2006, members of CienciaPR.org have published over 120 articles about science for lay audiences in the science and technology section of this newspaper.

¡Ciencia Boricua! is a collection of essays about science and Puerto Rico, written by 23 Puerto Rican scientists that generously donated their time and knowledge. The presentation of *¡Ciencia Boricua!* (you can see the video here [11]) took place on September 22nd, 2011 at the Puerto Rican Athenaeum's library and was attended by representatives from Pfizer and El Nuevo Día Educador (sponsors of the book), scientists, academics, and most importantly, Puerto Rican students—the next generation of "puertorro" scientists.

To close our week of fifth anniversary festivities, Ciencia Puerto Rico hosted the symposium *I want to be a scientist… now what?* The symposium, sponsored by Amgen and the RCMI [12] (Research Centers in Minority Institutions) program at the University of Puerto Rico Medical Sciences Campus, was attended by over 120 people, most of them undergraduate and graduate students in the natural sciences. During the event attendees heard about the challenges and satisfactions of being a scientist (see video here [13]); why go to graduate school in the biomedical sciences and strategies to stand out before and during graduate school (see video here [14]); and about funding opportunities and the importance that minorities are part of a diverse scientific workforce (see video here [15]).

Also, during the conversatory that gave closure to the event, attendees had the opportunity to interact with a panel of six scientists from diverse backgrounds and professions and voice their questions regarding a career in the biomedical sciences. From the language and cultural changes that may be presented by doing graduate school in the United States to the importance of fostering interest in the sciences from early education, the conversation was lively and the panel answered questions directly and effectively.

For us in Ciencia Puerto Rico the greatest satisfaction and the best way to celebrate our fifth anniversary is to share our knowledge and service with our beloved Puerto Rico and its future scientists. Thank you for your continued support during the last five years and the many years to come!

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