

ACPM Member Spotlight: Maria Mora Pinzon, MD, MS, FACPM,  
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Donna Grande, MGA, CEO of The American College of Preventive Medicine

Previous spotlight articles on members of the American College of Preventive Medicine (ACPM) have shown the diversity among the membership and the various positions held by physicians who are Board Certified in Preventive Medicine.

Dr. Ed Fess, CMO of Arizona's CareFirst and Dr. Chris Pernell, Chief Strategic Integration and Health Equity Officer at University Hospital were previously featured members with rich careers who are making an impact in population health. Recently I had the pleasure of speaking with Dr. Maria Mora Pinzon who is the ACPM 2021 Volunteer of the Year awardee.

Dr. Mora Pinzon has been extremely active with the College the past few years and is a model for how one can contribute to a professional association and gain new skills through volunteerism. As Chair of the Membership Committee and an Ambassador for our Social Media campaign, Dr. Mora Pinzon brings her tireless energy to every encounter. I wanted to share our discussion with you below.

**What attracted you to the specialty of preventive medicine?**

During my intern year, I saw many individuals coming to the hospital for preventable reasons (e.g., gunshot wounds) and I had no idea what was being done at the institutional or city level to prevent them. I saw many readmissions for things that are preventable (e.g., patients unable to do wound care as instructed because they had to work), and every time felt that my clinical training could not give me the tools and skills needed to assure that everyone had the proper care.

**Was there a breakthrough moment that led you to take your General Preventive Medicine/Public Health (PMPH) Board exam and join ACPM?**

I joined ACPM in 2015, a couple of months after starting my residency. At the time, it was the logical option to join the medical association for my specialty, to gain access to educational events, discounts, and networking opportunities. After being a member for six



Maria Mora Pinzon, MD, MS, FACPM

years, I can say that I got that and much more. ACPM is my home. The first annual conference I attended made me feel that I had found my people — their stories and work reflected my own — and showed me a world of possibilities that I had no idea was possible.

Taking the General Preventive Medicine/Public Health Board exam was part of the plan from the beginning of residency. I thought of it as a necessary pain, but over the last three years, it has become obvious that being able to say "I am Board Certified in Preventive Medicine and Public Health" gives me a level of credibility and authority in academic and clinical settings. And, I have used this credibility to advocate for more support for our specialty and work. Another benefit of being

board certified is being able to become a fellow of ACPM. I realized how important that was last year, at the beginning of the pandemic. I was part of a group of physicians from a variety of specialties that got together to write a press release related to preventive measures around sports events. All the other physicians included their fellowship affiliations, and they asked for mine. When I said that I didn't have one they asked if I was still in training. It was obvious that those five letters in the credentials were also indicative of authority and seniority, so I applied to become a Fellow of ACPM as soon as I could.

**How did your residency training prepare you for your current role?**

My residency allowed me to explore my interests and gain skills that were beyond bread-and-butter public health. This has allowed me to design and lead multidisciplinary teams, and approach problems using multiple perspectives and points of view, and above all, understand complex systems and how to navigate them.

**The pandemic has raised the importance of health equity on many fronts and as a bilingual physician trained in Venezuela, what do you believe the benefits of preventive medicine certification are in addressing racial/ethnic inequities that impact or influence health outcomes?**

Being a preventive medicine physician is more than having an MPH, it means understanding the intersection between the public and the individual, acknowledging the limitations of policies, understanding the implications on the healthcare system, and using all of these tools to promote health equity. In practical terms, my preventive medicine training allows me to assess the problems from the stakeholder's perspective and propose measures that can limit the spread of the virus, and maximize the resources and strategies to ameliorate the

impact of COVID-19 and the preventive measures in our communities of color.

**What advice would you offer to young physicians who are beginning their journey in medicine?**

The world is your oyster, the jobs for preventive medicine physicians are out there, but they are not advertised as "preventive medicine." If you are interested in something, knock on the door of those working in that field, prepare your elevator speech and do not hesitate to establish new connections. Recruiters and most human resources employees are not familiar with preventive medicine and are unaware of our skills, knowledge and competencies. Therefore, you need to get your CV into the hands of the decision-makers. Your CV should highlight your skills and knowledge and showcase the impacts you have made through your work. You should not be shy or afraid of amplifying your expertise.

**What is the best advice you received that made a difference in your career decisions?**

Learn to play the game. Academia and medicine in general have their own rules, players and hierarchies. In order to be successful, it is important to understand the rules and the motivations of those involved and play to your strengths.

**From your point of view, what is the key benefit that a professional association such as ACPM can offer an individual?**

Networking, networking, networking. ACPM events allow members to meet people from around the world and across different fields, which in turn opens opportunities for careers and positions that you might not have known are available. Saying "Hi, I saw you at the ACPM conference" is usually met with a very warm response and you never know what that conversation will bring.