

## Student Spotlight- Dr. Cesar Ortiz

### 1. Tell us about yourself

I moved to New York City from my native Colombia in 2008 and I have been living in this fantastic city ever since. I graduated from Medical School in Bogota and following this, trained in Internal Medicine and Infectious Diseases in the US. Right now, I am a practicing physician in Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, and I am also a second-year student in the Epidemiology



concentration at NYU School of Global Public Health. I am the oldest of three brothers and I live in the upper east side with my husband Tim and our dog Sidney.

### 2. What do you like about public health?

Public health has been very close to my heart since I was a medical student. Whenever I care for a patient, I always ask myself: “How could society and the biomedical science have prevented the development of this disease in this particular patient?” As physicians, we are trained to provide care to individuals but sometimes we forget that a significant proportion of diseases are rooted in systematic social inequalities that need to be addressed. I am also very passionate about using epidemiological research techniques to understand the distribution and causes of disease.

### 3. Why are you interested in the field of emergency preparedness and response?

As an infectious disease physician, you always think about epidemics and outbreaks and how to prepare for them. However, the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic has challenged every

single healthcare facility and public health agency in the world and has resulted in innumerable deaths and unquantifiable economic losses. This has given me pause and has made me question what I thought I knew and has motivated me to learn more about how to improve processes and preparedness in all levels of healthcare, in order to be ready for the next global disaster.

**4. Can you describe a project or experience that helped you in making a decision to pursue a career in this particular field?**

The world has seen multiple outbreaks of infectious diseases since I began my postgraduate training. From the H1N1 influenza outbreak of 2009 to the Ebola outbreak of 2014 and to the current COVID-19 outbreak, I have been at the frontlines of each one of these disasters and have learned from each one them.

**5. Who do you consider to be vulnerable populations and why?**

Every group of people who is in a position of disadvantage in comparison to another group is a vulnerable population, particularly when such disadvantage leads to poorer health outcomes. Such disadvantage comes in many forms and it includes poverty, limited language proficiency, low educational attainment, undocumented immigration status, sexual and gender identity minorities, amongst others. All of these make groups of people more prone to illness and when ill, more prone to poorer outcomes.

**6. What is a current emergency or disaster that you believe is critical to address?**

Right now, in the US there is an absolutely critical need to address the risks posed by pandemics to our national security, our economic prosperity and our leadership in the world. As the COVID-19 pandemic has made evident, our healthcare system can be easily overwhelmed by outbreaks, and the economic and social consequences can be

devastating. We need to ensure adequate access to testing, have clearer isolation and contact tracing policies and have better and quicker access to personal protective equipment. All of this has to be conducted under the scope of social justice and while prioritizing those in our society who are the most vulnerable.

**7. How do you handle stress and pressure?**

I think being organized and allocating enough time to carry on tasks is key to handling pressure. On a more personal note, I am an aviation and travel aficionado, so I enjoy watching documentaries and shows related to travel. I also find great relaxation exercising and I am a big fan of HIIT workouts.

**8. If you could cure a disease which would it be and why?**

If I could cure a disease of the body, it would be Diabetes. In my opinion, there is no other illness with greater capacity to kill a person slowly and to cause significant long-term disability. If I could cure a disease of society, I would cure poverty and racism. I strongly believe these two are the major causes of inequities in our communities and lead to shorter, less happy and less productive lives.

**9. Who is your favorite public health figure and why?**

Without a doubt Dr Anthony Fauci. He has been a great leader in the field of Infectious Diseases since the 80's when he led the country through the HIV/AIDS response and continues to do so while the country faces the impacts of COVID-19.

**10. What is next for you after you complete your MPH degree?**

I will remain in my current institution where I will continue to practice clinical infectious diseases; however, I intend to conduct population level studies in the field of resource utilization and outcomes in infectious diseases with a focus on oncologic patients.