

Student Spotlight- David Ray Garcia, MS, FNP-BC, NP-C



1. Tell us about yourself

My name is David Garcia and I am a family nurse practitioner living in Manhattan. I am currently beginning my third year in the Nursing PhD program at NYU, which will involve dissertation proposal and NIH grant writing. My proposed dissertation is a secondary data analysis on young men who have sex with men (MSM), examining substance use, violence, and HIV/AIDS risk, framed by syndemics theory. I am currently writing a grant for this, which I hope will be submitted for the January 2021 cycle.

2. What do you like about public health?

I like that public health looks beyond the medical model of disease, where disease is diagnosed and treated. To me public health looks at, what Michael Marmot calls, “the causes of the causes,” such as the social determinants of health.

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

I became interested in the field of emergency preparedness when I was exposed to events such as hurricane Katrina, H1N1, super-storm Sandy, and now COVID-19. I would like to relate what I learn in this class to HIV/AIDS, my current field of study.

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

I came to the conclusion that I wanted to study HIV/AIDS after I took a study abroad class on HIV/AIDS at NYU London, taught by Dr. Perry Halkitis. Dr. Halkitis is an expert in the field of public health and made me see that as a nurse researcher I could offer a contribution to HIV/AIDS research as well.

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

In my field of study, I have studied that HIV/AIDS affects MSM, but what is less talked about is how it disproportionately affects Black and Latino MSM, young MSM, as well as MSM over the age of 50. My candidacy exam was based on HIV and aging in MSM 50 years and older, but I knew this would be a difficult population to conduct research on. For this reason, I shifted my focus to young MSM after I found a nationally representative dataset to use for my dissertation, and I will certainly examine the health disparities that exist among the Black and Latino young MSM found in this sample.

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

Currently the national blueprint for ending the HIV/AIDS epidemic calls for the surveillance of “hotspots” where HIV/AIDS transmission is occurring at a disproportionate rate, particularly in the rural South of the US. I feel like this is a public health emergency that demands an emergency-type response. Though our current national administration proposed this blueprint, it has also drastically cut healthcare funding in this region, making this policy much less feasible.

7. How do you handle stress and pressure?

My advice is to take work in bits and pieces, meaning you have to acknowledge that it is better to start something first, and then continue to work on it over time. This involves time, and you must acknowledge that, rather than pretending it can all be done at once. It also involves collaboration, which can be done by discussing your work with your peers, exchanging papers for a peer-review, or discussing your work with mentors and advisors. Finally, make all your work consistent, if possible, meaning do not try to write on three different topics for three different classes. Ultimately you want to be able to pull all your work together for your capstone, candidacy, or dissertation.

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

I love this question because I have said this before, we will find a cure for HIV/AIDS in our lifetime. We have lost so much to the ravages of AIDS, and science has made so many strides, I know we will continue to progress towards a cure.

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

I have followed the work of Dr. Dimetre Daskalakis who serves as the Deputy Commissioner for the NYC Department of Health. Dr. Daskalakis has worked to make HIV prevention sex positive, while also bending NYC's HIV/AIDS curve for the first time. This week the Department put out guidelines for safer sex in the time of COVID-19, and I recommend everyone check them out.

<https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/doh/downloads/pdf/imm/covid-sex-guidance.pdf>

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

After PhD, my goal is to begin a post-doctorate. I would prefer to stay at NYU, but the culture is that you try to go somewhere else, such as Columbia or Yale. I would love to

do field work on people affected by HIV/AIDS on the South Texas-Mexico border,
which is where I am from and where my parents currently live.