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## **Dr. Mario Ramirez Personal Testimony**

Mario E. Ramirez

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the number of physicians who were born in South Texas, attended and graduated from a medical school and returned to South Texas to practice is nearly impossible to obtain. We were able to track 20 physicians who met those qualifications, and our information showed that only five had returned to South Texas to practice. Ten practiced elsewhere in our state, three went out of state, and no information was available as to the final destination of four of them. Our proposed program was not going to be designed as an ethnic one. However, demographics showed that the overall ethnicity distribution in all of our counties was slightly more than 90% Hispanic. Hispanics comprise approximately 13-14% of the United States population, but Hispanic medical school applicants numbered less than 6% of the total pool. The need was obvious and permission was granted. Our recruiting program would start in the summer of 1996.

I realized that there was an immediate need to formalize the program that we sought, and that we needed a plan which would allow us to reach targeted students. My wife shared my dreams. We needed to recruit a director who should have ample teaching, counseling, and organizing experience. We both knew a lady who had those qualifications. Mrs. Yvonne Kautsch was one of those persons who appear to have been born to the teaching profession and whose life had been devoted to helping young persons. She had an amazing ability to bond with students, and it was obvious that students loved her. We had worked together with her on our annual banquets for high achieving students in the Rio Grande Valley. We knew that she was a good planner and organizer.

We spoke with Mrs. Kautsch and she appeared to be very interested in pursuing the establishment of such a program. 'She would bring to the table years of teaching experience, and counseling, and a unique understanding of the teen-agers mind. I would bring personal knowledge of medical education, knowledge of the need that existed and my dream of what I believed we needed to accomplish. I also brought years of experience of working with young people add some counseling experience. We were aware that there were many reasons which were currently impeding larger numbers of students from pursuing health care professions. We called those impediments "leaks in the pipeline" and we attempted to describe them and to

attempt to find and implement solutions. The "leaks" identified were as follows: 1. Low Standardized Test scores (SAT & ACT). 2. Weak Foundation in the Sciences. 3. Lack of Time Management Skills. 4. Limited Coping Skills. 5. No Service Commitment. 6. Lack of knowledge about the Health Careers. 7. Lack of familiarity with the process. 8. No or Little Advisement/Direction. 9. Poor Communication Skills. (ie, Writing and Interviewing.) 10. Poor Reading comprehension. 11. Too many distractions, and no focus.

In the summer of the year 2000 Dr. John Howe, President of our Health Science Center sustained an accident and required extensive surgical intervention. That fall he expressed intentions to retire from the UTHSCSA presidency. As per custom The Board of Regents of the University of Texas System appointed a search committee for candidates who might qualify to replace Dr. Howe. My relationship with Dr. Howe had been excellent, and the support that he gave me as one of his Vice Presidents was of the highest order. He supported our Med-Ed Program wholeheartedly.

I learned that Dr. Francisco Cigarroa was one of the persons being proposed for the position. I had known the Cigarroa family for more than 60 years, and I had known Francisco since he was a young boy. Francisco's father, Dr. Joaquin Cigarroa had started his pre-medical studies at UT Austin in 1942 at the same time as I had and graduated from Harvard Medical School. We are close personal friends. Francisco's uncle, Dr. Leo Cigarroa, a great surgeon used to drive from Laredo to Roma to perform elective surgeries at our small hospital. Francisco came with him on one of those trips and he credits that experience as having been one of the factors that induced him to pursue a medical career. He graduated from Southwestern Medical School in Dallas and then did long, very specialized training at both Harvard and John Hopkins schools to become one of the nation's best infant organ transplant surgeons.

As a friend he sought my advice and opinion regarding his nomination for the Presidency of our Health Science Center. Initially I explained to him that I was aware of the deep love and passion that his uncle and his dad had toward medicine and that I knew that

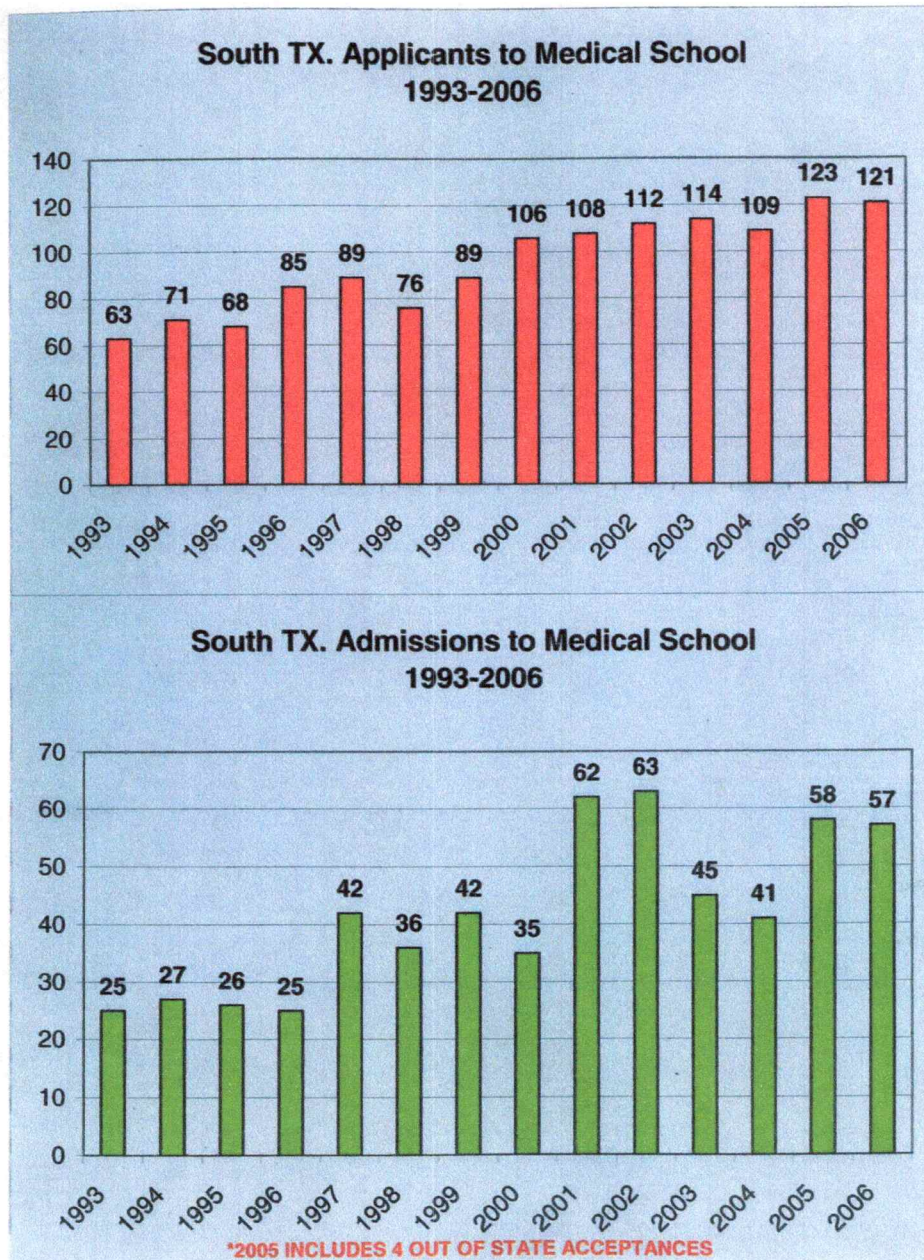
shared this same passion. I did not know if would be possible for him to abandon his surgical practice in pursuance of an academic administrative position. He explained that both his father and uncle had been deeply involved in educational endeavors and that he too shared that interest. Maybe I was a little hesitant but I did encourage him to allow his name to be place as a nominee. Within a few days I realized that he would be perfect for the Presidency, and that we needed him. I encourage him to proceed wholeheartedly and I set about helping him in any way that I could. Dr. Francisco Cigarroa was one of the five finalists competing for the position of President of the University of Texas Health Science Center in San Antonio.

**On October 10th, 2000 the Board of Regents of the University of Texas System unanimously voted to elect Dr. Francisco Joaquin Cigarroa as the next president of the UTHSCSA.**

In November of 2003 Hispanic Magazine published an eloquent story about Dr. Cigarroa. It is attached here.

Dr. Cigarroa has been an exemplary and formidable President. He has continued to make time to perform surgical procedures often. He has been very supportive of our Med-Ed Program. A speech that he made to a Laredo audience affirms this support and is attached'

By the year 2006 and 2007 data demonstrated that the Med-Ed Program was effective, and that it had produced positive results. During those 13-14 years the number of South Texas Students applying and being accepted to medical school doubled. Med-Ed does not claim that it is totally responsible for the success that is evident. We do believe that directly and indirectly Med-Ed has been a strong factor. Med-Ed has helped to focus on the fact that South Texas is uniformly medically underserved.



In 2005 Mrs. Yvonne Kautsch retired. She had performed excellently and had done much to promote and assure the success of the program. It was difficult to find a replacement, but Mrs. Esmeralda Lozano who had previously worked as a recruiter for the

program applied and was accepted for the position. She has done well.

Every year the Med-Ed program hosts a reunion and all former students as well as current students are encouraged to attend. Each event has been a total success. The reunion in 2005 was dedicated to Mrs. Yvonne Kautsch, the one in 2007 was dedicated to Dr. Ramirez. A copy of his remarks at the reunion follow. Also included are copies of testimonial letters from our first two Med-Ed students who have graduated as physicians, Hector de Leon and Michelle Band.

Hector is originally from Roma, Texas and Michelle from McAllen, Texas. A third letter is from Mr. and Mrs. Juan Carlos Guerra. Juan Carlos has graduated from dental school, and his spouse Iris from the Allied Health Physician Assistant Program. Both are former Med-Ed students. Also attached is a very special letter from one of our students who attended a fieldtrip to the UT MD Anderson Hospital in Houston.

Dr. and Mrs. Francisco Cigarroa continue to be our very closest personal friends. He helped me immensely during my service as his Vice President for South Texas Initiatives. He has made numerous trips to South Texas and has proven beyond a doubt, that his heart is very close to South Texas. He is one of the very best presidents in the University of Texas System and he continues to perform admirably as our President of the University of Texas Health Science Center.