



NEWSLETTER

THE ASSOCIATION OF FORMER PAHO/WHO STAFF MEMBERS

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Rest in Peace, Carissa Étienne

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Editorial

By Gloria A. Coe, AFSM President
19 February 2019 – 31 December 2023

Greetings to all and wishing you a happy, healthy, and prosperous 2024!



As the Association of Former PAHO/WHO Staff Members (AFSM) closes another successful year supporting our friends and colleagues, we recognize that in many ways the ability of the Association to provide guidance and support to former staff often depends on a collaborative relationship with PAHO's administration, both in Washington and in the countries. We have had the privilege of meeting Dr. Jarbas Barbosa, PAHO's new Director, twice during the past 10 months. Dr. Barbosa warmly welcomed us to his office and listened to our concerns. We discussed progress, programs, and challenges of AFSM and of our members.

It was wonderful to welcome Dr. Barbosa to our 23 February Board and Focal Point meeting, during which he congratulated AFSM members for continuing our engagement with PAHO and with friends and colleagues with whom we worked. He emphasized that during his administration, PAHO's priorities would focus on surveillance, strategies to support and improve COVID vaccination and treatment across the Americas, strengthening public health systems, and increasing both transparency and efficiency within PAHO.

AFSM thanked Dr. Barbosa for naming Dr. Daniela Fernandes da Silva as our liaison with the Director's Office. We met with Dr. Fernandes three times this year. We are grateful to Dr. Fernandes for her prudent guidance, leadership, and support of the Association.

The Association's Board, with the support of our Focal Points, worked throughout the year to support and bring benefits to our members. 2023 Board members are Gloria Coe, Carol Collado, Marilyn Rice, Hortensia Saginor, Sylvia Schultz, Gina Watson, Hernan Rosenberg, Juan Manuel Sotelo, Rolando Chacon.

In the beginning of 2023, the Board reflected on the strengths of our Association which are to:

- Provide information on Staff Health Insurance and the UN Pension,
- Assist members with SHI and Pension concerns,
- Support older members through their Designated Support Person,
- Assist members with questions about the PAHO/WHO Federal Credit Union (FCU), and
- Provide enjoyment, fellowship, and learning opportunities during local, national, international social and educational programs.

We agreed we would continue to focus on three priorities, to:

- increase member participation,
- strengthen information and communication with members, and

- engage with PAHO, WHO, ARAIO, and other international organizations.

We identified two areas to be further developed:

- Strengthen AFSM's relationship with PAHO's Human Resources in Washington and in the countries, and
- Increase our relationship with the Staff Association.

In our March 2023 Board Meeting, PAHO staff member Carolina Bascones, who represents the global staff of WHO before the United Nations Joint Staff Pension Fund, presented a summary of the 75th Session of the Pension Fund Board. Among Carolina's highlights were:

- The Pension Fund is considered one of the best.
- The Pension Fund Board will present to its beneficiaries an Asset-Liability Management study to assess investments, their performance, and the solvency of the Fund.
- The Board approved a Funding Policy to ensure it meets its long-term obligations to its beneficiaries.

Most of AFSM's day-to-day programs and progress are implemented by our four Committees. The highlights of the Committee programming in 2023 were:

Outreach: Coordinated by Hugo Prado and Philippe Lamy, has the role *to promote the enrollment of former PAHO/WHO staff and their full involvement in scientific, technical, cultural, educational, administrative, and social activities, including new initiatives and activities defined and proposed by AFSM members.* The document outlining its proposal is available on our website in four languages. You can expect greater contact with them as they will soon be surveying members to learn of your expectations and needs in relation to AFSM.

Healthy Ageing: Coordinated by Martha Pelaez. *Its focus is to work closer with PAHO's Decade of Healthy Ageing Program.* With PAHO's support, the Committee held three webinars: The first focused on how to enhance a functioning home environment despite an individual's physical and mental impairments. This was followed by a Webinar on long-term care in Spanish responding to aspirations of retirees for their wellbeing and respect, regardless of declines in physical and mental capacity. The third focused on long-term care in the US and English Caribbean. All webinars are available on PAHO's YouTube channel.

Health Insurance and Pension: Coordinated by Carol Collado, *has a broad mandate to support, inform, and clarify for our members matters relating to health insurance and pension.* During 2023, the Committee responded to requests for support, most of which were to clarify health insurance rules, deal with problems relating to insurance claims and payment delays, among others. A summary of the "Survivors Guide" detailing what must be done to report a death and to continue receiving health insurance and pension benefits - is on our website. Articles with SHI news are included in the quarterly newsletters and Carol represents our members on the Director General's SHI Advisory Committee. In relation to the Pension Fund, under the leadership of Rolando Chacon and with focal points support, the committee contacted 57 of the 64 individuals who did not return their Certificate of Entitlement.

Communication: Coordinated by Marilyn Rice, *has the role and responsibility of informing our members on many topics using multiple channels.* To assure clarity and consistency, the committee edits all formal AFSM documents, correspondence, postings, blast messages, and emails in both English and Spanish. The AFSM PAHO Newsletter is published quarterly in both languages edited by the Editor-in-Chief and Co-editor, Marilyn Rice and German Perdomo, respectively. It is distributed to the global family of AFSMs, and it recently included articles from AFRO and SEARO.

The Association thanks Violeta Mata, the Focal Point in Mexico, for accepting the invitation to be our **Webmaster** and coordinator of **Facebook**. Among advances this year, the Website has adopted new technological advances and design facilities that will continue in the coming year to ensure it is more friendly and interactive. On Facebook, the members are discussing information received from the Healthy Ageing Webinars Organized by AFSM's Committee. On the recently created *General Chat Section* members interact on multiple topics. It is also a platform for members to ask question on topics such as health insurance, certificates of entitlements, among others.

Antonio Hernandez manages our **Blast messages**, sending about 60 each year. We thank him for his wise and generous support.

In addition to our Board and Committees, a critical role is played by our **Chapter in Colombia and our Focal Points** in 23 countries and Europe, all of whom move the Association closer to our members. They help provide meaningful and important support to former staff, regardless of where they live. To facilitate the relationship between AFSM and PAHO, we introduced our Focal Points to the PWRs in their respective countries.

The Global Council of AFSMs has met virtually twice each year beginning in March 2021. In April 2023, we received invitations from Dr. Tedros to attend the World Health Assembly in May. We had the opportunity to attend meetings together, work together, and personally meet and thank Dr. Tedros. AFSM Geneva and its Co-Presidents have worked tirelessly to promote this good will.

We are grateful for the support of both Dr. Barbosa and Dr. Tedros and the efforts of the AFSM Global Council to recognize and include former staff in the responsibility of the Organization and of the PWRs. This will, of course, be a challenge for our Association in countries where we do not yet have a Focal Point, such as in Chile, Guatemala, Honduras, Paraguay, and Venezuela.

Although we made good progress to achieve our goals, we also have a few challenges for 2024:

Firstly, we need each of you to become an **active** member. Participation in the work of the Association is key to our continued success. We ask our members to recognize that all we accomplished did not happen magically. Someone gave of his/her time and expertise on behalf of the Association and on behalf of you - our members. Please look for opportunities to actively participate and to enjoy the pleasure of supporting our wonderful PAHO family.

Secondly, we must take a good look at AFSM and consider its composition. We understand the number of permanent positions in PAHO has decreased. Staff now spend less time in the Organization, leaving as a PAHO alumni and not necessarily a retiree with full benefits. However,

each may enjoy networking and participating as a member of our Association, and we will actively invite their membership.

Thirdly, the Association and our Global Council will continue to seek institutionalization and full recognition by PAHO and WHO.

And fourthly, as ageing members of society, it is important to provide strong leadership to PAHO, our communities, and our families, on the goals and programs to achieve the goals of the Decade of Healthy Ageing and to support a global cultural shift that emphasizes respect, care, and support of older people.

To conclude, I would like to repeat that AFSM is for all of us; it is shaped and created by all of us. The Board and Focal Points are always searching for new opportunities to support our members. We continue to ask for your participation, ideas, and suggestions on how to strengthen our Association.

A sincere thanks to everyone who gave their time and expertise on behalf of the Association and of our members. It is because of you that AFSM PAHO had this successful year!! A special heartfelt thanks specifically to:

- Each of our Focal Points for their dedication, commitment, and generous support in giving of their time and care for AFSM members living in their countries or areas,
- The members of the Board of the Colombia Chapter and to its President, Alberto Concha, for their broad leadership of our members,
- The Coordinators of our AFSM Committees: Carol Collado with collaboration of Rolando Chacon, Marilyn Rice with collaboration of German Perdomo, Martha Pelaez, Hugo Prado and Philippe Lamy for their vision, dedication, and leadership to organize and direct the work of the Association.
- The members of the Board: Gloria Coe, Carol Collado, Marilyn Rice, Hortensia Saginor, Sylvia Schultz, Gina Watson, Rolando Chacon, Hernan Rosenberg, and Juan Manuel Sotelo.

On the afternoon of 6 December, the Board met and elected the members of the 2024 AFSM Board. Since both Gloria Coe and Hortensia Saginor resigned from their respective offices and as members of the Board, two new members were elected to the Board.

We proudly announce members of the 2024 Board are: Hernan Rosenberg, President; Hugo Prado, Vice President and Coordinator of the Outreach Committee; Juan Manuel Sotelo, Secretary; Karen Gladbach, Membership Officer; Sylvia Schultz, Treasurer and manager of Zoom; Carol Collado, Coordinator of the Health Insurance and Pension Committee with collaboration of Rolando Chacon who informs on the UNJSPF and coordinates AFSM's annual election; Marilyn Rice, Coordinator of the Communications Committee and Editor-in-Chief of our Newsletter with the collaboration of German Perdomo, President Emeritus and Co-Editor; and Gina Watson, Member at Large.

We ask our approximately 665 AFSM/PAHO members to recognize thirty of our fellow friends and colleagues who generously gave to the Association of their time, expertise, and support in 2023 to bolster our members and their families during their older years. This represents 4.5% of our members. As we grow and *develop to an even stronger group, it will be critical to increase the percentage of active members. We encourage the remaining 635 members to accept this opportunity to actively participate, support, and provide leadership and guidance to make the Association everything it can be.*

I have worked with the Association for the last eight years. The environment has always been one of integrity, trust, generosity, basic goodness, a close reliable working and caring family. Team AFSM is committed to upholding the highest values of the Pan American Health Organization, the World Health Organization, the Association of Former PAHO/WHO Staff Members, and of our members. It is my wish this spirit will continue for our new 2024 Board - - and for many years.

THANK YOU!! ;GRACIAS! ;OBRIGADA! ;MERCII!



Welcome to New Members of AFSM

From Colombia:

Marina Navarrete

Luis Jorge Perez Calderon

Hector Julio Gonzalez

From Peru:

Betzabe Butron Riveros

From USA:

Verónica Ortiz

Sonia Maria Mey Schmidt Verme

Obituary for Dr. Carissa Etienne

Dr. Carissa F. Etienne, a native of Dominica, served as Director of PAHO and World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Director for the Americas from February 2013 to January 2023.

During Dr. Etienne's tenure, PAHO led the response to the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic in the region of the Americas, as well as efforts to control Zika and chikungunya epidemics and cholera and yellow fever outbreaks in Haiti and Brazil, while significantly improving the Organization's response to emergencies and disasters within 48 hours.

Under her leadership, the Americas eliminated the endemic transmission of measles, rubella, and congenital rubella syndrome, and made considerable strides in the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases. Legislative and regulatory mechanisms gained traction, as countries enacted legislation on the labelling of food products and introduced taxes on sugar-sweetened beverages.

Advances were also made in strengthening national health systems and in progress toward universal health. She championed the achievement of Universal Health as an overarching goal for the Americas, based on the primary health care approach. This included developing strategies, policies, and plans to expand access to comprehensive care, particularly for vulnerable populations and in underserved and rural areas, strengthening governance and stewardship in health, improved financing for health, and intersectoral action to address the social determinants of health. In the last five years of Dr. Etienne's mandate, deliveries by skilled birth attendants increased from 95% to nearly 100% and, for the first time, the Region of the Americas reached the recommended target of 25 physicians and nurses per 10,000 people.

Prior to becoming PAHO Director, from March 2008 to November 2012, Dr. Etienne served as Assistant Director-General for Health Systems and Services at the World Health Organization (WHO) in Geneva, Switzerland. Before that, she served as Assistant Director of the Pan American Sanitary Bureau from July 2003 to February 2008, where she led five technical areas: Health Systems and Services; Technology, Health Care, and Research; Health Surveillance and Disease Management; Family and Community Health; and Sustainable Development and Environmental Health.

During her tenure at both WHO and PAHO, Dr. Etienne directed efforts to renew and strengthen health systems based on primary health care. She has also spearheaded policies for reducing health inequities, increasing people-centered care, and integrating health into broader public policies.

Dr. Etienne began her career in her native Dominica as a medical officer at the Princess Margaret Hospital and was later appointed as the Chief Medical Officer of that country. She has also served in other high-level posts in Dominica, including as Director of Primary Health Care Services, Coordinator of the National AIDS Program, Disaster Coordinator for the Ministry of Health, and Chair of the National Advisory Council for HIV/AIDS.

Dr. Etienne received her medical degree (Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery-MBBS) from the University of the West Indies, Jamaica, and her Master of Science Degree (MSc) in Community Health in Developing Countries from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, University of London.

Dr. Etienne spoke of her humble beginnings at the official unveiling of her portrait at the Embassy of Sweden in Washington D.C. in January 2023. “From a little girl in Massacre, Dominica, walking bare foot, going to school, being as every other child was. If that child can rise to become Director of PAHO, then there is hope for every child that walks the streets of the Americas. And if we keep that in our minds, we will do whatever it takes to ensure that child really develops,” she said.

“Carissa was a dear friend and colleague, and under her steadfast leadership and guidance, PAHO achieved significant milestones for the region of the Americas while facing one of our greatest public health challenges with COVID-19. I am very saddened by her passing, and my thoughts are with her family, friends, and all of us at PAHO who cared deeply for her. We have lost a great public health champion. Dr. Etienne’s invaluable experience will be sorely missed in global health discussions to improve the lives of people and to ensure better preparedness for global health emergencies.” PAHO’s current Director Dr. Jarbas Barbosa.

“This is a very sad moment for all of us and for those that believe in Primary Health Care and practice Public Health. Her work during the recent pandemic that is still affecting the world adds to a rich legacy that serves to illuminate the path for thousands of health professionals in their mission to cover and bring health services to the best levels, without leaving anyone behind. I met Carissa on many occasions, from Barbados, Washington, Geneva and Ouagadougou, Belize to Panama where we last met. She always treated former staff with respect and pointed out that we are from the same family. We lost a leader and dearest friend that will be missed and her many contributions and energy will enlighten the generations to come. [I express] my sincere condolences for her family, friends, staff of PAHO and Former Staff Members of the Organization. I pray for her soul,” pointed Juan Manuel Sotelo, Former PAHO staff member and AFSM PAHO Board member.

“[I am] deeply saddened to learn of the passing away of our dear friend Dr Etienne. As I helped her on her first few days at PAHO she used to call me her "PADRINO". Rest in peace dear friend! My prayers for your soul.” Former PAHO staff member Jose Romero Teruel.

“I am very, very sad to hear the news of the passing of Dr Etienne. The first time I met Carissa Etienne was in São Paulo when she received a prize for her work on PHC in Dominica. We had lunch together. We met again on her first day in PAHO/DC as AD. During the time she was working in Geneva, I always had a meeting/lunch with her. After my retirement, Carissa always made a point of coming to visit me at my house here in Brasilia. I liked and respected her very much and I will miss her.” Former PAHO staff member and a AFSM PAHO Focal Point for Brazil Lucimar Coser.

“[I am] Deeply saddened to learn of the passing away of Dr Etienne. [I send] Heartfelt condolences to the bereaved family and the larger of family of WHO and associates, who lost an able, experienced, and effective leader of global health.” K. Rajan, President of AFSM SEAR.

AFSM PAHO President, Gloria Coe, shared the poem *Immortality* by Clare Harner:

Do not stand at my grave and weep,
I am not there, I do not sleep.
I am a thousand winds that blow;
I am the diamond glints on the snow.
I am the sunlight on ripened grain;
I am the gentle autumn's rain.
When you awaken in the morning's hush,
I am the swift uplifting rush
Of quiet birds in circled flight.
I am the soft star that shines at night.
Do not stand at my grave and cry.
I am not there; I did not die.

And an important post from Facebook by Dr. Tedros was:



The image is a screenshot of a Facebook post from the account 'drtedros', posted 10 hours ago. The post features a profile picture of Dr. Tedros and a link to 'Ver traducción'. The main text of the post is a message of condolence for Dr. Carissa Etienne, Director Emeritus of the Office of the Surgeon General for the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO). The text is in bold black font on a blue background. Below the text is a photograph of Dr. Carissa Etienne, a woman with short dark hair and glasses, wearing a red blazer, smiling. The background of the photo shows the PAHO logo and the WHO logo.

drtedros 10h
Ver traducción >

I'm deeply saddened to hear about the passing of our dear friend, Dr. Carissa Etienne, @opspaho Director Emeritus, due to a heart attack. Her loss is truly heartbreaking, and she will be greatly missed.

Carissa's dedication to public health and her significant contributions to @who WHO leave a lasting legacy. She was a visionary leader who inspired us all.

On behalf of WHO, I extend our heartfelt condolences to her family, friends, and colleagues.



Staff Health Update

By Carol Collado

First of all, a Happy Holiday season to you all and your friends and families!



Finally, there is good news on the COVID front. In a mid-November report, WHO reported that in the Region of the Americas there had been a 76% decrease in cases reported in the previous month, and a 98% decrease in deaths in the same period! As mentioned in the last newsletter, there may be a margin in this due to only 32% of countries reporting, and of those, a probable under reporting due to the lifting of the COVID emergency status. In any case, the percentages are sufficiently high that we can be assured that some decrease, probably significant, has occurred. Holiday time brings a lot of gathering so a word of caution is still the best approach. When in large groups or if you have any of the major underlying susceptibilities, being safe is better than being sorry, so protect yourself with masks and handwashing in those conditions.

Following up with long Covid from last issue, where we mentioned that the US National Institutes of Health were studying this entity, they have now begun clinical trials for the treatment of Long Covid, examining a longer use of Paxlovid as a possible treatment and brain training to evaluate responses on brain fog and other cognitive effects of this disease.

In September WHO announced the availability of three new vaccines: malaria, dengue, and meningitis. Some of these are particularly oriented toward protecting children, however, with the effects of climate change being felt throughout our Region, these diseases are appearing in areas where they were not previously seen. Once again, caution is the best preventative. Protect yourself during the day from mosquitoes that carry these diseases. Use of repellents should be obligatory when outside in areas where prevalent.

Respiratory diseases tend to show up around this time of year across the Region. I hope that you have gotten both the flu and the RSV vaccines to be proactive in protecting your health. Some people have reported that they were told that the RSV vaccine was not covered by our insurance. This is not so. It is not yet listed on the list of vaccines covered at 100% but it is covered at the usual 80%.

Reminders about our responsibilities in keeping us healthy and enjoying life at this age should include:

Activity: a recent study by the United Kingdom National Institutes for Health and Care Research showed that brisk walking reduced falls in the older adult by one third, and that even those with limited mobility had improved health for every 500 steps they increased their activity level. Another study showed that any type of walking or golf-type activity increased cognitive function. Since falls and dementia are often cited as big concerns in the ageing population, getting and staying active seems like a good idea.

Healthy eating: Holiday Season, also known as Temptation Season, often presents some challenges to our healthy eating because of all of the gatherings, traditional foods, and goodies. Remember to keep hydrated, consider eating some protein or fiber-rich foods if you know that a big feast is coming up, as these will lessen your abilities to overindulge. If, like many, you will be using the New Year to start healthier dietary practices, increases in fresh fruits and vegetables, and lessening red meat will assist you. Remember as well that when changing, any choice is doable for one day. Try to make the changes simple and fun to increase their do-ability.

Maintaining community: Socialization is part of the human condition and interaction part of a healthy lifestyle. Holiday events can help to reconnect you with others and help you enjoy those times of sharing and remembering, so do take advantage.

A last idea for you to begin the New Year. Your Health and Pension Committee produced this year a three-page document on what to do in case of death. Doing all of the above will help to keep you out of that category for some time, we hope. We have learned, however, that many still do not know that this document exists.

Please, as part of your New Year resolutions, go to the AFSM website, print out the three pages, and leave them with your important documents. It will be a big help for whoever needs to resolve health and life insurance and pension matters for your survivors:

https://www.afsmpaho.com/files/ugd/6814f4_47e3e8bb415945fca4a3b4f8cf205d87.pdf



WHO Launches a Commission on Social Connection



Social connection is essential for health. Social isolation and loneliness are global problems that affect both older and younger people and have serious consequences for health and wellbeing.

For example:

- Social isolation and loneliness increase the risk of premature death as much as obesity, excessive alcohol consumption, and daily smoking.
- Social isolation and loneliness increase the risk of stroke, cardiovascular disease, anxiety, depression, and dementia.

An advocacy report jointly published by WHO, the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), and UN Women also highlighted social isolation and loneliness as cross-cutting issues for the UN Decade on Healthy Ageing.

Taking social isolation and loneliness seriously is a practical necessity to build a better world in which to grow old. It is about promoting health, wellbeing, social cohesion, and human rights, while ensuring a sustainable and inclusive future for all generations.

That is why we welcome the WHO's announcement of a new Commission on Social Connection.

The WHO Commission, under the leadership of world-class commissioners, will raise the visibility and priority of social isolation and loneliness, reposition them as genuine and serious public health problems, and mobilize resources to scale up solutions.

To date, while national and local initiatives are being developed to address the problem, a global response has been lacking. The WHO Commission on Social Connection comes at an opportune time to catalyze global leadership during this United Nations Decade for Healthy Ageing.

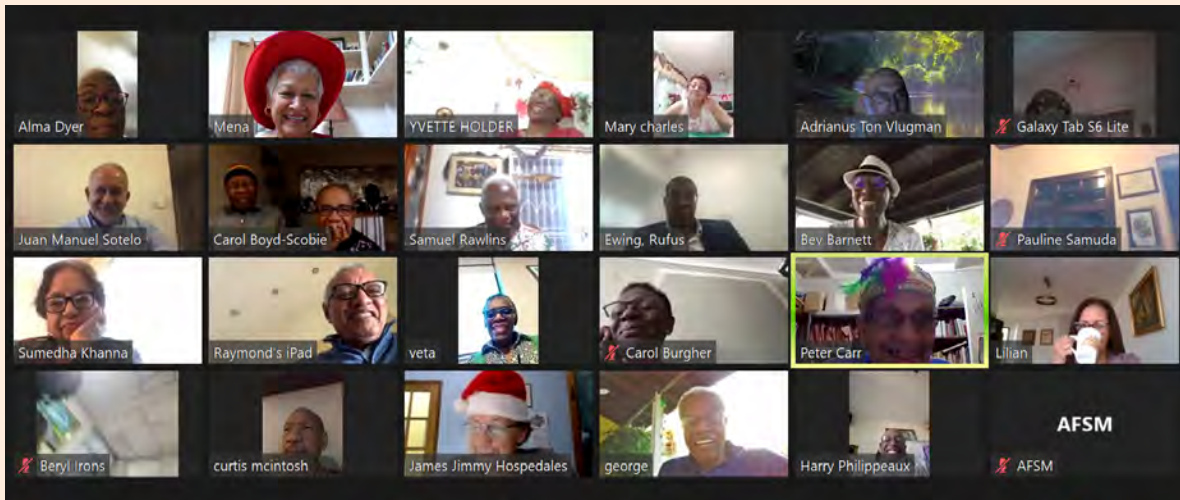
Join us in supporting the new WHO Commission's three-year journey to foster global connections by visiting their website and using their resources to spread the word!

<https://www.who.int/groups/commission-on-social-connection>



Caribbean Retirees Online Christmas Party 2023

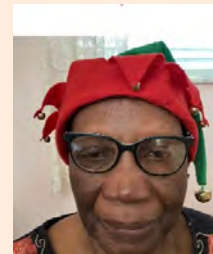
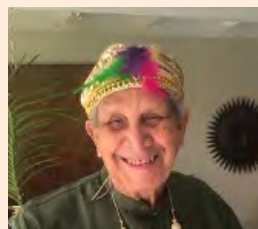
By Mena Carto



The 2023 Caribbean retirees online Christmas party had 24 attendees – approximately 3 more than the 2022 party attendees. First-time attendees included Lilian Reneau-Vernon, who now lives in Guatemala and who looked young and sprightly, Alma Dyer (former PAHO consultant and wife of the late Hal Dyer), and Rufus Ewing who was a recent retiree and who some felt was too young to be a retiree.

We were especially honoured that Mona Khanna rearranged her commitments so as to be able to join us, while previous attendees Mirta Roses, Henry Smith, Heather Jacelon-Welch, and Gina Watson had commitments that were unavoidable.

The persons whose hats ‘took the cake’ were Adrianus (Ton) Vlugman, Peter Carr, and Yvette Holder.



Ton was dressed like Santa Claus and according to reports received, he rides around the island of Barbados on his motor cycle, dressed like Santa Claus but wearing short pants, and bellowing ‘ho, ho, ho”. Peter wore his Trinidad carnival hat which was a classic, and Yvette donned her elf’s hat that was a most unusual Christmas hat.

Where are we now?

The program commenced with introductions and brief updates by each attendee with regard to major happenings in their lives during the year. Some attendees e.g. Mary Charles, Sam Rawlins, Peter, and Alma, were more chatty than others. Juan Manuel was very bouncy and said that he was very excited to see everyone.

In general, most people had led a quiet and contented life during the year and they were mostly taking life easy. Some said ‘same old, same old’ while others said that their aim in life was to do as little as possible and not to stress too much. Life during these senior years was spent with loved ones and especially sharing in the lives of the grandchildren. James Hospedales, who had officially retired some years ago, claimed to be working harder now than ever before, while some others were still doing some type of contractual work.

In our midst were some recent octogenarians, whilst a few had entered their 9th decade of life. Among the latter was Peter, who celebrated his 90th birthday with a family gathering and who in his speech told his family members ‘don’t cry when I die because remember, I will be seeing all of you sometime’. Peter, at 90 still wears a costume and parades down the street of Port of Spain to celebrate the Trinidad Carnival (known in Trinidad as playing mass), does brisk walking, and lectures at the University of the West Indies.

During the year, Mona Khanna published her book on *Dancing Feet in a Man’s World- A Woman’s Cross-Cultural Journey to herself*”. The book, that captures a lot of her work with PAHO and especially in the Caribbean, includes photographs and is now available on Amazon.

A number of attendees (including Lilian, Yvette, Esther De Gourville, Peter, and Raymond Reid) were fortunate during the year to visit places in different parts of the world and to link up and reminisce with old colleagues about times past. I myself had cause to be in St. Kitts and had the pleasure of being invited home to tea by Sam – and we chatted like old friends even though we hadn’t seen each other for more than 25 years. But who knows? There may yet be a ‘reunion’ among Caribbean retirees who live in South Florida and within reach of Yvette – as she discovered, much to her surprise!

During the conversation, it was Sir George who said that ‘you can’t help getting older, but you can help getting old’. In echoing this sentiment, we all agreed that exercise was essential in keeping the joints ‘oiled’ as we advance in age. Some of us engage in walking, some play golf, some do yoga, and some are avid gardeners. To keep the mind active, some play board games whilst some volunteer at church and within service organizations – including Sam who is part of a group that addresses the needs of persons living with Alzheimer’s in St. Kitts.

Despite the efforts to keep healthy however, there was mention among the attendees of those who had had hip surgery, knee surgery, back surgery, colon issues, growing forgetfulness, etc. Regrettably, some had lost loved ones while others were caring for their spouses who were not in good health. However, there was some acknowledgement of the small mercies of life when the group admitted that ‘I am as happy as I can be, as long as I can poop and pee’.

In Memoriam

It was with great sadness that we observed a moment’s silence in honour of the untimely passing during 2023 of Dr. Carissa Etienne, former Director of PAHO and Dr. Elisha Tikasingh, late entomologist of CAREC. The group recognized the immense contributions that these individuals had made during their years at PAHO, as we also remembered common Caribbean friends who had passed some years ago. In reflecting on the departure of our colleagues, there was general affirmation regarding the philosophy of ‘live while you can’ – because no one knows when your name will be called.

Carol Karaoke

As is now traditional, the group engaged in a period of joyous bedlam during our attempt to sing carol karaoke. Our ‘choir master’ was Sam while the DJ was Yvette. Sam had had some years of singing in a choir during his time in Port of Spain and so had some claim to being able to sing. As DJ, Yvette was adept at pulling up the lyrics of the carols online for us to follow in singing.

Despite our best intentions to sing six carols however, the varying speeds of internet transmission within the different countries resulted in what could best be described as a cacophony of voices. In the end, our very wise choir master decided that we should only sing three carols: We Wish you a Merry Christmas; Silent Night, Holy Night and; Feliz Navidad.

Toast

To close the formal program, Peter called for a the toast during which everyone raised their glasses containing whatever ‘liquid’ they had opted to drink. While some had some form of liquor, Curtis Mc Intosh declared that he was only drinking water these days. Everyone wished each other the very best – until next time, while some continued chatting for a full extra hour.

To all of our former colleagues out there **A HAPPY NEW YEAR!!!**



Relationship Among the PAHO/WHO Voluntary Aid Group, the AFSM Colombian Chapter, and the Union Foundation Project

By María Cristina de Taborda and Nelly Marín

At the AFSM Colombian Chapter assembly held on 13 October 2023, the PAHO/WHO Voluntary Aid Group had the opportunity to take stock of its collaboration with the social aid project entitled the Union Foundation Project, that is related to the “Maria is my Mother” Soup Kitchen (Comedor María es mi Madre) and the “House of Hope”, with the support of the AFSM Colombian Chapter.

The synthesis presented herein shows the importance of the joint work of the PAHO/WHO Voluntary Aid Group, the AFSM Colombian Chapter, and the Association of Former PAHO AFSM Staff in Washington. The work was carried out within a framework of social commitment with the Union Foundation Project, based on the actions of the Decade of Healthy Ageing, given that the social activities in which we work focus on this most vulnerable group.

PAHO/WHO Voluntary Aid Group

Founded in 2004 by the wife of the PAHO/WHO Representative in Colombia at that time, it brought together former staff and spouses of those who worked or had worked for PAHO/WHO, as well as national professionals who at that time worked in the Representation. Most of the founders are still part of the group, that was joined by three United Nations volunteers when that group dissolved. At the moment, we have the participation of the PAHO Representative in Colombia and her mother.

The support of the Volunteers focused on the population of unprotected older adults, a population group that constitutes a painful reality in Colombia.

Most of the members of our group were closely linked to health and, more specifically, to the broad field of Public Health, either in our own professional practice or as spouses of those who did so. Interest in and affection for everything related to public health is vital in volunteer work and it permitted us to contribute, although very partially, to the social wellbeing of those who did not have the privileges that we all enjoy. This gives us the satisfaction of continuing to feel useful in working for a common interest: the wellbeing of older adults.

An additional value of the Group has been that our knowledge and experiences as residents of Colombia, especially with regard to the orientation of potential new members, such as spouses of former Colombian PAHO staff, retired former staff, or PAHO/WHO staff who

returned to the country after living abroad for many years. We have managed to consolidate ourselves as a source of support for them and, no doubt, also for ourselves.

Colombian Chapter of AFSM (CC-AFSM)

The Colombian Chapter was created in 2007 by a small group of retirees residing in Bogotá, Medellín, Cali, Cartagena, and Washington. This Association is structurally part of AFSM with Headquarters in Washington, in accordance with AFSM's by-laws.

Since the creation of the CC-AFSM, some members of the Voluntary Aid Group (former PAHO/WHO staff or spouses of retirees) belong to both the Washington AFSM and the CC-AFSM. This has facilitated social work with the Union Foundation Project, developing joint actions to achieve both the mission and the goals that both groups pursue. Regarding the protection of old age, the Union Foundation Project has benefited from the technical support of some retirees from the CC-AFSM and other volunteers, mainly in the areas of epidemiology, vaccination, Covid-19, healthy ageing, medication management, epidemiological surveillance, food safety, and environmental hygiene, among others. Additional aid was provided through the annual financial support programmed in the work plan of this Association.

Union Foundation Project

The origins of the Foundation date back to 1987 when Ray Schambach, a well-known benefactor, started a food support project for elderly homeless people. From the beginning, it had the support of Fernando Quintero, current Director of the Union Project. Likewise, Captain Jaime Duque and his family supported these efforts from the beginning and contributed to the founding of "Maria is My Mother Soup Kitchen" almost 23 years ago. Little by little, with the collaboration of other people and institutions, including the PAHO/WHO Voluntary Aid Group, breakfast and then lunch began to be provided to this unprotected population. Currently, between 100 and 120 older people come to the soup kitchen for breakfast and the number can reach 180 for lunch.

The growing insecurity in the streets of Bogotá motivated the opening of the "House of Hope" in April 2007, which has progressively been adapted to provide a dignified shelter for those older adults who, due to their health or age, can no longer sleep on the street. Currently, 30 of these adults benefit from this resource.

This work was later extended to provide lodging and logistical support for children who come with their mothers from remote regions of the country to be treated at the Cancer Institute, as well as for those children with severe disabilities or terminal illnesses who are abandoned by the family. To do this, the original team sought more help from people and companies and the Union Foundation Project was established. Our cooperation with and the reference group for this continue to be the elderly population.

WHAT HAS BEEN THE SUPPORT OF THE PAHO/WHO VOLUNTARY AID GROUP AND THE CC-AFSM?

Fixed financial contributions, according to commitments agreed annually; among them the payment of water service, one of the largest operating costs of the kitchen, and a monthly contribution for food as part of the basic food basket.

Support for specific needs to fix the physical infrastructure of the headquarters or its facilities. In this area we have contributed over time to fixing the roof, renovating the kitchen, following the demands of the local Health Authority, and providing kitchen and dining room utensils for the **Soup Kitchen**. In the **House of Hope**, the renovation of the house was supported to adapt it as housing for the elderly, as well as the provision of furniture and belongings.

Traditionally, the Volunteers strive to **celebrate Christmas** by providing a special meal and a small gift for everyone who goes to the Soup Kitchen, including those who live in the House of Hope.

From a technical point of view, the professional profile and expertise of the members and other retirees of the CC-AFSM have been garnered to provide specific advice to the two institutions of the Union Foundation Project that help older adults.

Financing the work of the Volunteer Aid Group, as stated above, was possible mainly due to the monthly contribution of each of the members that, on occasion, had to be supplemented with extraordinary help from family and friends. An annual contribution from the CC-AFSM, approved in successive assemblies and previously channeled through our group, has allowed us to strengthen the response to previously agreed-upon needs or specific urgent requests.

Finally, we want to emphasize that the achievements reached through this joint work experience seek to reduce inequalities and improve the comprehensive human development of older adults. We emphasize that there is fluid communication with the Foundation's officers for timely attention to be paid to the needs expressed by older adults that, among others, are related to health problems.



Note on the VII Seminar on “Ethics in Health Management”

By Juan Manuel Sotelo



I participated in the VII Seminar on “Ethics in Health Management”, that took place in Vatican City from 27 November to 1 December 2023, and I am sharing with you this brief account of my participation, done at the request of the AFSM President.

I made a presentation on *Universal Health: the best path for health care* and I take the opportunity to remind the members of AFSM who read these notes that this topic is very pleasant and stimulating for former PAHO and WHO staff, as well as for all those who in some way are linked to public health. There were more than 80 participants from eight Latin American and three European countries at the meeting, with differing interests. Among them were: a minister of health, doctors in charge of providers and administrators of health care institutions, some health authorities, directors of large public and private hospitals, deputies and senators, judges, deans, a former Miss Universe, representatives of international organizations, and others interested in the topic.

The topic I presented is based on the deterioration of health systems around the world, particularly as another sad result of the COVID-19 Pandemic. Universal Health Care is a goal and, at the same time, an instrument to advance Health for All.

It is about ensuring that all people and communities have access to health services without discrimination of any kind and without suffering financial hardship. Universal Health Care ensures that everyone is covered, that they have access to care when and where they need it. It requires intersectoral participation and the collaboration of society as a whole.

The basis of this topic has to do with the current situation of providing health services and creating progress towards a healthier world with an imperative of social justice. If we consider the provision of health services at the current time, 30% of people do not seek health care due to economic reasons, and 20% do not seek care due to geographic barriers. The OECD report *Health at a Glance 2023*¹ indicates that health systems are under pressure and, among other reasons, points out that health spending as a proportion of GDP has fallen in 2022 compared to 2021 in 33 of the 38 OECD countries². Additionally, only 5 of the 38 countries allocate more than 6% of its GNP to public health (PAHO, 2023). Issues such as mental health have not recovered after the pandemic, and the prevalence of depression remains at 23% in the United States, 15% in Mexico, and 16% in France and the United Kingdom.

The challenges and inefficiencies are due to poverty, social injustice, educational gaps, and poor living conditions, among other factors that influence people's health.

¹ <https://www.oecd.org/health/health-at-a-glance/>

² Countries belonging to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development

There is disparity in access and quality. The world experiences serious consequences of climate change that affect the entire population, such as Hurricane Otis that recently devastated Acapulco; population dynamics, that with migration produces relatively new problems; and the reappearance of diseases and war conflicts in various parts of the planet that affect the entire population. The challenges include preparing ourselves better with greater investment in health, science, and technology; training human resources; and revisions in legal and regulatory frameworks that facilitate preparation for and response to new emergencies that affect health.

Included among the benefits of Universal Health Care, and taking into account a global perspective, are improved access to health services, positive results, and economic advantages. I refer to the drop in vaccination coverage and its sad share of reintroduction of problems that we had already solved such as measles, poliomyelitis, and tuberculosis, among others.

The fundamental principles of Universal Health are: coverage for all, comprehensiveness of services, equity and justice, and financial protection. It is important in a Seminar on Ethics and Health Management to see these principles well reflected in our efforts, no matter where we are located.

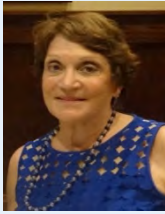
Universal health models, with some successful cases such as those of Singapore, Switzerland, and France, and the lessons learned were explored. I commented on public and private sector participation, as well as policy considerations and possible public perceptions. By ensuring the quality of services, stimulating innovation, and incorporating new technology, tangible progress can be seen. However, many countries are not adequately prepared for digital transformation. While 90% of countries have online portals, only 42% of the public has access to and interacts with the portal. It is very important to have metrics, such as those in the *Atlas of Social Development Goals (SDGs) of the World Bank, 2023*, to visualize how progress is being made towards the SDGs country by country.

To conclude, I summarized the key points to take into account, especially in Latin America, as well as various initiatives promoted by countries, international organizations, civil society, the private sector, and academia, that necessarily imply collaboration and the building of trust in the population.



My Journey on the Silk Road – Part 3, Architecture

By Marilyn Rice



We had the opportunity to visit palaces, mosques, madrassas (religious schools), mausoleums (tombs), and minarets (towers used to announce the call to prayer and to keep watch for advancing enemy armies), each more elaborate than the next. They are architectural miracles.

Since Suni Islamists could not use images of people or animals, we saw many of the buildings decorated with verses of the Koran, calligraphy, geometric and floral designs, all using colors accessible from natural minerals to produce blue, turquoise, and white.

Many of the religious buildings are built with domes to help with air circulation but they also represent heaven. Historically the outside of the domes were smooth, but Temur's architecture introduced ridged ones and we saw both types of domes, sometime in the same complex of buildings.

In Samarkand, Uzbekistan:

Mausoleum of Temur



Shahi-Zinda mosque with several tombs including one for Kusam Iban_Abbas; this site has the best tiles of safire blue and turquoise and beautifully painted terra cotta mosaics, and is one of the holiest place in Central Asia.

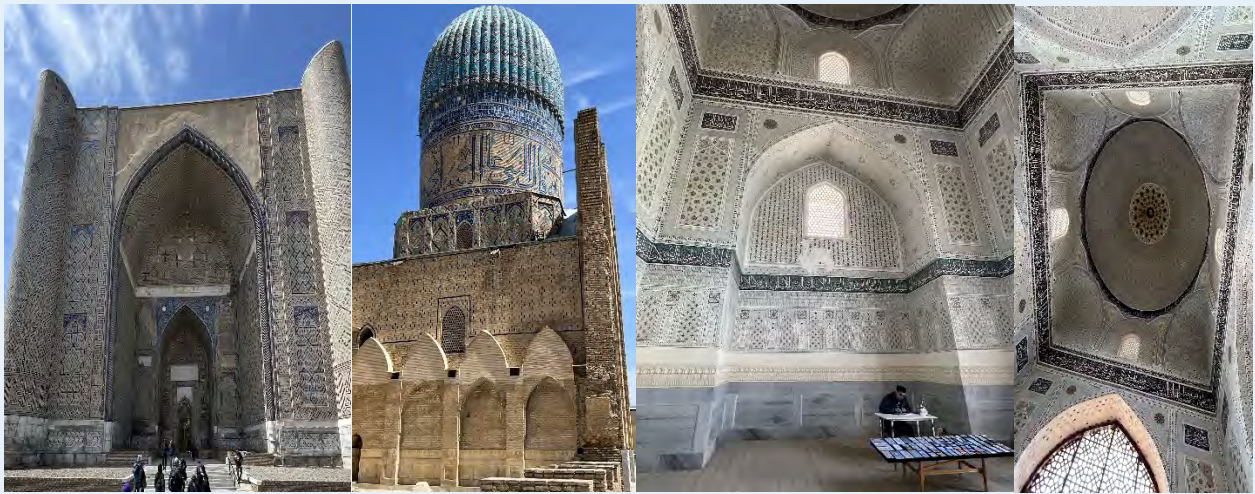




Registan Square, the original town square in Samarkand, with three madrasahs:



Bibi-Khanym Mosque was constructed as the cathedral mosque of Samarkand, to be the main mosque of Timurid Power, for five years using the best architects, artists, and craftsmen from conquered countries.



In Tashkent, Uzbekistan

Barak Khan Madrassah



In Bukhara, Uzbekistan

Laybi-Khauz Mosque

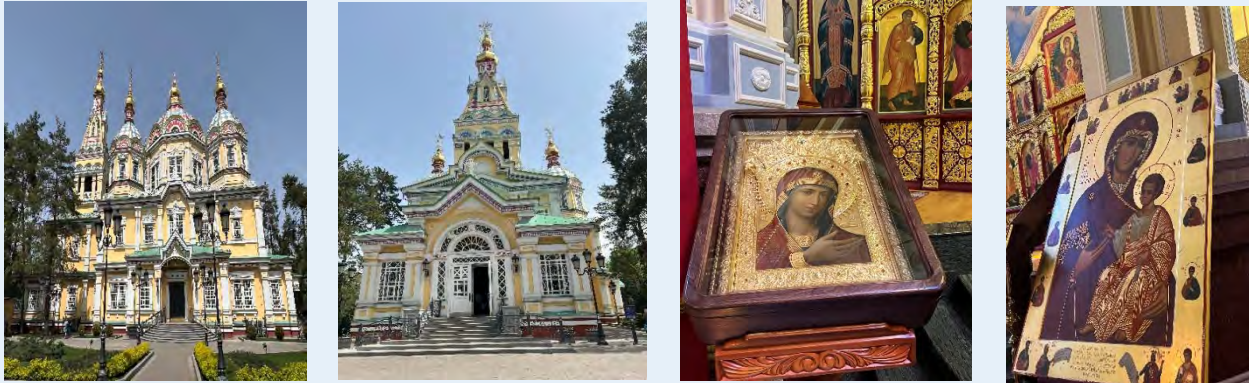


Jewish Synagogue from the 16th century and home to the only Jewish school in Central Asia, with one of the oldest Jewish torahs in the world.



In Almaty, Kazakhstan

Chief Russian Orthodox Cathedral





The Kofi Navruz Palace, in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, was built in five years (2009-2014) by four thousand masters, each achieving mastery in a craft as magnificent as I have ever seen, including decorative wood carving of walls, columns, staircases, and ceilings, as well as magnificent ceramic tiling. It is where the Shanghai Cooperation Organization was established in 2001 bringing together for trade purposes China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan (subsequently including India, Iran, and Pakistan).



The Arbob Palace in Khujand City, Tajikistan, the local farmers' cooperative, was built in the 1950's by their own hands in their time away from the fields, in a style to mimic St. Petersburg's

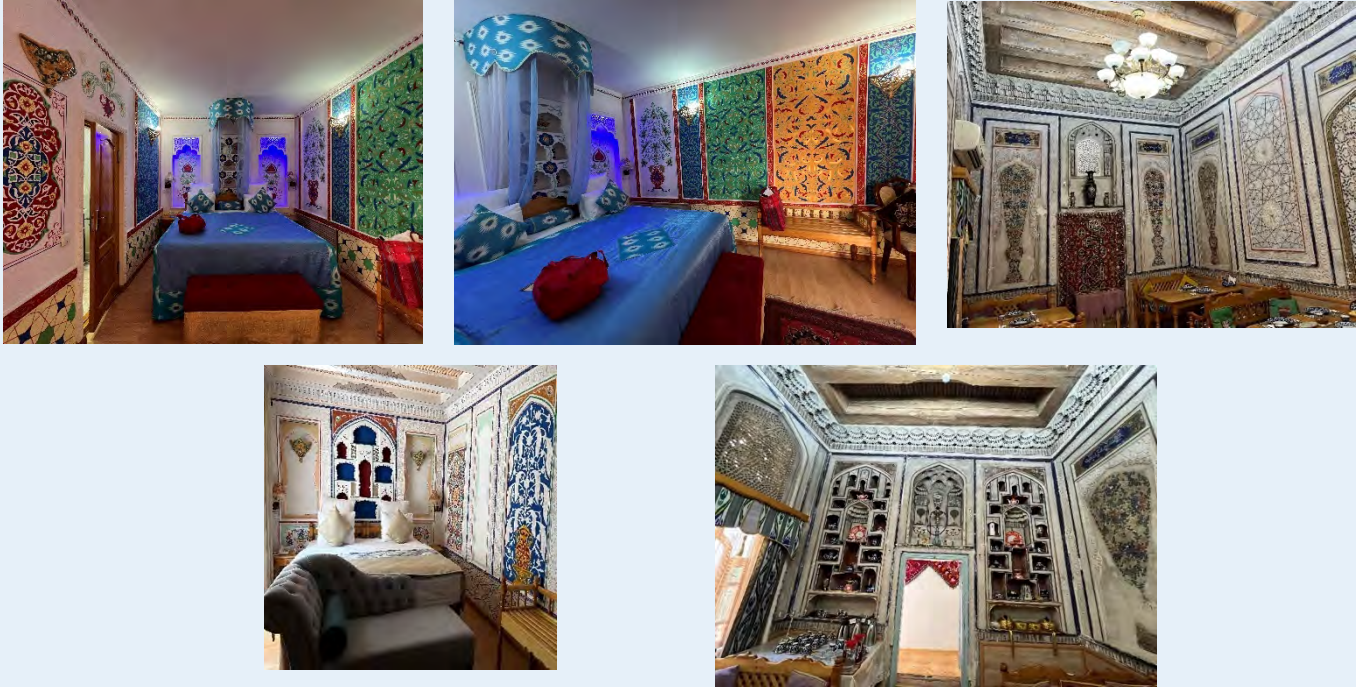


Winter Palace. It is truly grand and sumptuously decorated with intricate designs, traditional painting, and alabaster carvings.



Amelia Hotel in Bukhara, Uzbekistan

This hotel was a Jewish merchant’s house built at the end of the 18th century and it has maintained the traditional Bukharin style design.



Art, a Bridge to Health and Public Health Tool

By María Edith Baca Cabrejos



Art is older than the appearance of the first traces of language. Carlos Caruso, in his work on art as a mode of expression and communication, points out that art is approximately 35,000 years older than the appearance of language.

For many decades, this means that art served as a vehicle for human communication. Therefore, we can infer that art preceded science, in the same way that children learn to sing before understanding the meaning of words.

For this reason, when you want to psychologically evaluate boys and girls, you make them paint. It is through the drawing and the color used that they will express their feelings and experiences, and we can see how their inner world unfolds.

Art, in addition to being the oldest and primary vehicle of communication and cultural expression, is linked to the principle of pleasure and to the realization of sublimated desire. It is a generator of beauty and creativity. But above all, art generates individual and collective identity; it helps in the processes of differentiation among different peoples and thereby helps to build their history.

As Carlos Caruso maintains, “in a sociocultural environment and historical circumstances that tend to consider emotions and feelings as a hindrance, everything that facilitates their expression and communication and allows them to be shared with others favors psychophysical balance and health. That is what any type of artistic manifestation does (...).” “It is a repeated experience to observe that, in the groups that are formed to practice any form of art (painting, literature, music, poetry, dance, etc.), bonds of solidarity, affection, and friendship are formed, that transcend the specific work and act as support both in personality development and in crises. This is invaluable when individualism, exclusion, and every man for himself embrace solidarity.”¹

We know that emotions come before ideas; one learns through emotional needs. For this reason, knowledge that only reaches the level of information and cognition does not produce behavioral changes.

Art, due to the emotional and subjective essence that inspires it, can better connect with ideas of change, reach the deepest depths of people, and, at the same time, translate a vivid expression of reality. Thus, art can be an instrument of expression and social change.

However, art is undermined and beaten down by the development of a model encouraged by the market. Art is considered as a hindrance, or a way to generate wealth for some through technological development or, failing that, it is perceived of as a devalued work by people who could not develop themselves in other fields.

¹ Caruso, Carlos. 2002. El arte en la promoción de la salud y la prevención de enfermedades. Buenos Aires, Argentina <https://foroarteysalud.files.wordpress.com/2009/07/arte-desde-carusso.pdf>

However, no matter how many negative trends it may have, art is enduring. It is linked to our own origins, to our own individual and collective identities throughout the history of humanity.

Without art, our lives, in addition to being boring, would be very unhappy and would weaken our defenses, producing greater morbidity and mortality.

History records the expression and use of art from the perspective of illness, from the extremist, as compensation. Without detracting from this fact, art needs to be built from life itself, from the health and wellbeing of people.

Reimagining art as a true source of health promotion and illness prevention is a challenge for health professionals.

The expression of emotions and feelings contributes to physical, mental, and social balance, and art is a channel for their expression. Art is therapeutic: in addition to activating endorphins because it is linked to enjoyment, it also promotes actions and leadership, builds protagonists of our history, and is a source of solidarity, cohesion, and friendship, as Carlos Caruso points out.

Many health experts who promote change, such as Edmundo Granda, Mario Rovere, Wagner de Sousa Campos, Paulo Marchiori Buss, Dina Czeresnia, Beatriz Kalinsky and Eduardo Menéndez, postulate that reimagined public health must include in its work the subjective dimensions, the power of life, the promotion of dialogue and communication, and the strengthening of individual and collective identities, methodological differentiation, and renewed social participation.

They are right about expanding public health and from this perspective, art can be incorporated as an innovative instrument that helps connect with the healthy parts of people, to enhance them and build health from there.

Art as a tool of social transformation

This force of art for transformation is proposed from movements such as those of the “*Theater of the Oppressed*” by the Brazilian Augusto Boal: “We must all participate in theater to find out who we are and discover who we can become (...) the goal of Theater of the Oppressed is not to reach the reassuring balance, but rather the imbalance that leads to action. Its objective is to energize. This is achieved through concrete action on stage: the act of transforming is transformative! “In transforming the scene, I transform myself.”² This approach is more linked to Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*³ and has and continues to have researchers, activists, and artists who follow this school.

Art and health: from the individual to the collective and from the doctor's office to the community

² Augusto Boal (2006). El teatro del oprimido. Rio de Janeiro.

https://www.postgradoteatroeducacion.com/wpcontent/uploads/2017/01/1Teatro_Oprimido_Master_TA_febrero_2017.pdf

³ Freire, Paulo. 1969. Pedagogía del Oprimido. Edición incompleta. Santiago de Chile.

<https://www.servicioskoinonia.org/biblioteca/general/FreirePedagogiadelOprimido.pdf>

The benefits of incorporating art among the resources for the diagnosis, treatment, and recovery of different pathologies are recognized, especially in the emotional and psychological spheres, since they allow, among other things, the projection of internal conflicts, making them more visible and explicit, thereby advancing their resolution.

Thus, different experiences arise that use music, plastic arts, body expression, theater, among other artistic manifestations, in the treatment of patients with mental health disorders, psychosocial problems, or other non-communicable diseases.

In the same way, the therapeutic effect of laughter, known for thousands of years, began to be structured and systematically organized from the experiences of Patch Adams and the emergence of the “hospital clown.”

It is from this experience that analogies can be established that allow us to move from the individual to the collective. For example:

1. While the hospital clown connects with the healthy side of the patient and from there operates to produce a therapeutic effect, the community clown connects with the healthy side of a community to promote the process of transformation of its negative aspects.
2. The clown shows and makes evident what is usually hidden, and from that point of view invites solidarity, and proposes and promotes change.

In summary, enhancing the healthy and good parts of people through the vital essence of art generates individual and collective health. This fact brings us together to convert art, in addition to all its innate properties, into an instrument of public health with an interest in reaching people, in being closer to their inner world, their individual and collective identity, and their wellbeing.

Thus, as Aaron Antonovsky said, “health is created where people live, work, study, play, and love”⁴.

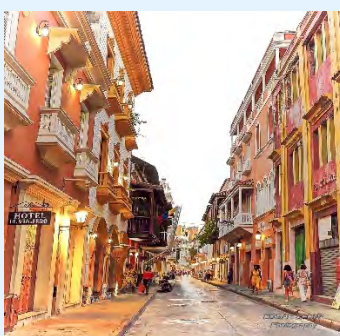
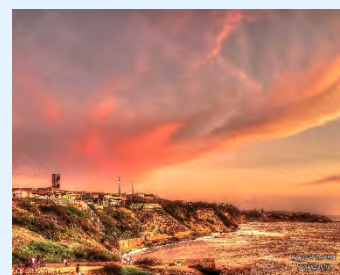
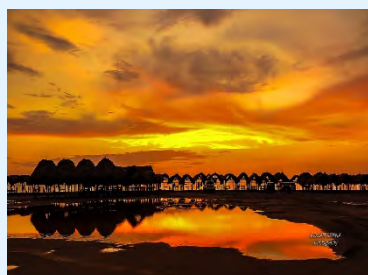
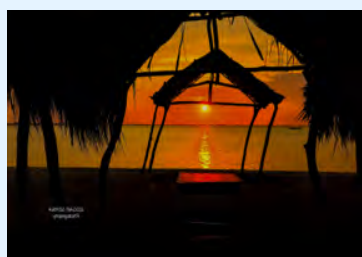
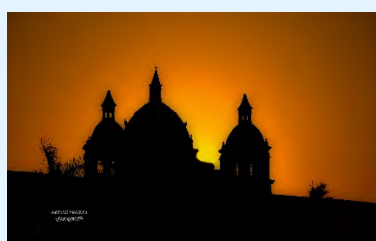


⁴ Antonovsky, A. 1979. Health, Stress and Coping <https://search.worldcat.org/es/title/Health-stress-and-coping/oclc/16490606>

Artistic Contributions sent by our Members

The following pictures and texts represent the many artistic contributions we received from our members, in response to our call for them to send samples of their artistic activities.

Photographs By Edgar Serina



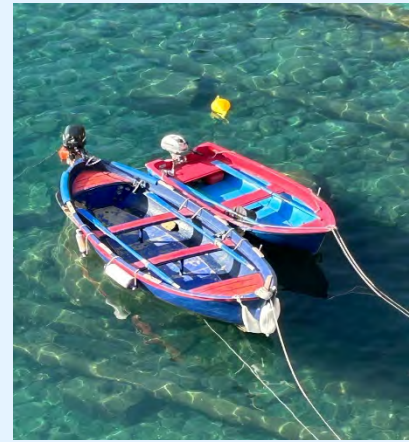
Artistic Contributions sent by our Members



Photograph by Ricardo Fecina, La Liguria, Italy



Photograph by Ricardo Fecina, Cinqueterre, Italy



Photograph by Ricardo Fecina, Cinqueterre, Italy

Paintings



Jorge Jenkins and painting



Fish, by Jorge Jenkins



Early Morning Scouting in N. Carolina, by Maite Viller



Lighthouse, Key Biscayne by Maria Teresa Cerqueira



Sea Grapes, Miami Beach by Maria Teresa Cerqueira



Sea Grape Leaves, Miami Beach by Maria Teresa Cerqueira

Artistic Contributions sent by our Members



Dog Roxy, by Maite Villen



Dog Murphy, by Maite Villen

Ceramics and crochet



Pottery, by Theresa Kuo



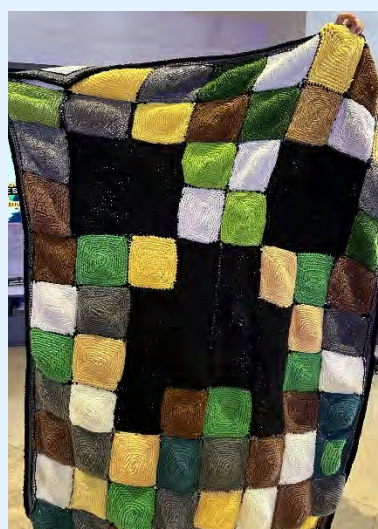
Pottery bowl, by Theresa Kuo



Pottery bowl, by Theresa Kuo



Pottery bowl, by Theresa Kuo



Crocheted blanket with Mind Craft
by Maria Teresa Cerqueira

Dancing Feet in a Man's World: A Woman's Journey Across Cultures to Herself

Book by Sumedha M. Khanna¹



This is a personal story of Sumedha Mona Khanna's extraordinary life journey, presented in images, stories, and anecdotes. She wrote this book especially to share with the younger generation of girls in her extended family, her nieces, and most of all, her grandnieces. "I want them to know about me after I am gone and to be inspired that a woman can do whatever she wants in life. It requires courage, determination, and stamina. "A spiritual memoir, the author shares how her awareness of her inner power of her spirit was totally unique. It is this spirit, represented in her Dancing Feet, that inspired her to the great adventures and achievements recounted in her book. She was born a third daughter in India, a culture that welcomes sons not daughters, during a time of revolution, yet she became the voice of health for women and children in world organizations dominated by men and politics. Sumedha hopes that her story offers glimpses of hope and courage to others wanting to break through traditional values. She opened the doors for many women and believes that once a critical mass of consciousness is reached, a shift will occur. A shift to the understanding that we live in One World, with equal rights and opportunities for both women and men.



¹ This book is commercially available at many sites, in English only.



Workplace apoptosis¹

By Mario Martinez Gonzalez²

Death came looking
for all retirees
It was twelve o'clock noon
And she found them lying down...!

Some were watching TV,
others were well dressed
drinking atole³, or chocolate
or bitters as a snack

Death, very surprised
when she came to take those
who had retired from life,
was left reflecting...

"We have overcrowding,
both above and below.
We better not bother them...
let them stay a while longer!"

"...in all, at the end of the day
the balance is not so precise,
more dead or less dead
no one will care..."

Outside time continued
with all its haste and during which
the retirees saw
its progress without worrying.

Death was envious
and returned to the other side,
walking with her head down,
arriving at the cemetery

She thought: "I am already tired
of removing retirees",
She thought: "with so much time...
I would have retired by now!"

¹ Apoptosis means a slow death.

² Published in the book "*Unofficially*"

³ Atole is a cornflower drink.

Once upon a time there was a park¹



By Mario Martinez Gonzalez

Once upon a time there was a park
where a bird sang,
once upon a time there was a park
that the sun illuminated
casting shadows,
shadows of places
that hid things
that the heart left.

Once upon a time there was a park
living among the streets,
like an hourglass
that accompanied time,
accompanied the soul
that with solitude
went looking to accompany
those dressed with love.

Once upon a time there was a park
like in other cities
frequented by so many
emotional moments
that were offered in the afternoons
to those who took refuge
knowing that the shadows
flirted with the sun.

Once upon a time there was a park
where the air was changing
by distant youth
who never returned,
once upon a time there was a park
that one day had a bird
that perhaps with time
also aged.

¹ From the book *Sin equipaje*

ANOTHER ONE, HIM

By Mariela Toro

It happened that one day, he got up early and went to San Alejo's room to dig through the garbage dump of his entire life. A mysterious box, unnoticed by everyone, caught his attention, and he arranged it for inspection. That hectic, unpredictable, and already forgotten day, he discovered in it a very unique, very important, unknown, confusing character; a true enigma: Himself... or, another.

Trembling, with surprised disbelief, he looked at photos, records, whistles, shields, knives, banners, stickers, compasses, magnifying glasses, and pipes. Complex useless objects, such as a strange magnetized item to search for screws and nails hidden in furniture; shark repellent; a tinderbox with an impossible-to-light fuse; and the smell of an exotic city, kept in a small box, stimulated his curiosity. Massage items, sandalwood, gardenia, almond, and other Patchouli oils that were mixed into multiple oriental aromas, stored with incense and various fetishes that he described as extravagant. From another corner came puppets dressed in batik, dancing Thai dolls; puppets, masks, a kukari¹, and an astonishing dagger. Preserved intact, in Chinese tissue paper, were an Arab turban or kufiya², a Turkish Fez, a raccoon cap, and a kepi³ of unknown origin. Of the outstanding souvenirs that captivated his attention were a small wooden Sueco cap, a two-story red bus, and a quartz pyramid. To complete his first tiring snooping were pictures of Hindu gods; reproductions of famous painters; sepia postcards; some stamps; and a bundle of yellow letters from his existentialist friends who lived through the postwar period in Paris, with whom he maintained a short correspondence.

Emerging from the bottom of that magical box were: maps, city plans, and remnants of train and plane tickets, as well as dictionaries, one in Telugu, another in Hindi and Marathi, ranging from Swedish to French, Italian, English, Spanish, German, among others. Included were ten expired passports, five blue ones that gave him a diplomatic character, ID cards, diaries from the last century, concert programs, glass cases, broken bifocals, the goggles that belonged to his father in their original case, and three pocket watches with fobs. Also found were hotel keys, soaps, threads, needles, buttons and scissors; coins and banknotes from many countries; a score of the soul of the poets in French; and two binoculars that were faithful witnesses of their voyeurism.

The fat, wide manila envelope that finally came out of the bottom portion housed all the academic information that he excitedly read: *look!... he shouted, these are contracts as a consultant for an international organization... imagine!... he exclaimed very upset, while he wheezed with pathetic difficulty. This is how he found the national and international invitations, the congratulations, the degrees and postgraduate degrees, the diplomas,*

¹ A Nepalese knife that has a slight curvature

² A traditional male scarf from the Middle East and Arabia

³ A cap with a flat circular top and a visor

workshops, and courses, with a colorful cluster of rosettes, scrolls, mosaics, and even an honorary degree and an order of merit that revealed an outstanding figure. - someone else. There were too many recognitions and for a moment they positively disturbed his mood.

While he looked at me with a questioning face, in a moment of lucidity he discovered, with a strange emotion, that all at once it was He who was this free, avant-garde spirit, who walked in the antipodes⁴ of Medellín.

He, the master of all the pathways, sitting with a world map on his knees, tried to interpret that world that was unrecognizable to him.

Each object that came into his hands vaguely contributed some remote experience stored in a curriculum that was archived ever since an ambiguous gray shadow devoured his mind, overshadowing his “I am”. This was someone of the forceful theories and exaggerated rhetoric, who convinced audiences with his deep, throaty voice, that was now stuck in a desperate and incomprehensible stutter.

Tired of all that hubbub, he entered into the night, forgetting that unknown, confusing, and enigmatic polyglot, who he found in his personal belongings kept with such zeal in that mysterious box, and who he did not recognize, in Him.



In Memoriam

DEATHS INFORMED IN 2024
AND NOT PREVIOUSLY REPORTED

Shun-Hwa Chen Liu, 14 December 2020

Fernando Rocabado, 28 October 2023

Harold B. Hubbard, 7 August 2023

Raul Jesus Londoño Escobar, 18 November 2023

Enrique Samayoa Castillo, 12 December 2023

Julio Bejarano, 4 January 2024

Our Sincere condolences to Hernan Rosenberg for the death of his mother Eugenia Rubel, on 18 January 2024

Our condolences to Patricia Ilijic for the death of her husband Edmundo Ilijic, on 12 January 2024

⁴ Any two places or regions that are on diametrically opposite sides of the earth.

AFSM/SEAR Attendance at the Regional Committee Meeting

By M.R. Kanaga Rajan, President, AFSM/SEAR



I have the pleasure of reporting – on behalf of the Association – the attendance of AFSM at the SEA Regional Committee (RC) session. Following my official request and persistent efforts, AFSM was invited to participate in the 76th session of WHO/SEA Regional Committee held in New Delhi on 30 October – 2 November 2023.

As this was an election year for the post of Regional Director (RD), the atmosphere was electric during the first two days, with intense indirect lobbying by the candidates. The agenda of the RC was the usual generic one as this is an odd year, and included the topics of the program budget for 2024–25, the implementation review of the 2023–24 budget, and the last Annual Report of the present RD. The most important and much anticipated item on the agenda was, no doubt, the Nomination of a new Regional Director. There was a Ministerial Round Table conference on the second day.

On the third day, the election of the RD was preceded by an Oral Presentation and Q&A session with the two candidates. The Election was then held in a private closed-door session and the results were announced after about an hour. Ms. Saima Wazed of Bangladesh was declared elected as the next Regional Director.

In the subsequent plenary session, the Member Countries congratulated Ms. Wazed on her nomination, and paid glowing tributes to the outgoing RD. The highlight was the speech by Dr. Tedros, DG. The fourth and final day was devoted to rapid deliberations of the remaining agenda items, with the concluding session passing the resolutions and adopting the final report of the RC.

I had the opportunity to have sideline discussions with the Director of Administration, several WHO Representatives, as well as some senior staff about AFSM and its work. I was able to have a brief chat with Dr. Tedros when I voiced our gratitude for his support to AFSM. In a brief meeting with the RD-elect, Ms. Saima Wazed, I offered her our full support and cooperation, and sought her patronage and support for AFSM and our work towards the interests and welfare of all former staff members and retirees.

Overall, it was a positive experience for AFSM to attend the RC and an opportunity to improve our exposure and visibility.

Previously being a member of the Secretariat, I had participated in over 15 sessions of the RC, and organized two sessions, in Sri Lanka and Indonesia. Attending this RC session as an invitee participant and representing AFSM gave me a special feeling of bon homie, privilege, and pride! More importantly, I am happy that this gave AFSM a good image and due recognition of the importance of former staff members and their interests.

As the DG says, “*once WHO, always WHO*”, and we, the former and retired staff members, have much to contribute to, and to look forward to receive from our Organization.





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