

The COVID19 Pandemic and its Effects on Geriatric Care: a conversation with Mexican geriatrician Emilia Chino

Who is Emilia Chino?

Emilia Chino is a practicing physician currently living and working through the Covid-19 epidemic in Mexico City. She is an accomplished Boston University alumni who studied medicine at the [Metropolitan Autonomous University](#) (UAM) in Mexico D.F..

As a medical student in Mexico, after completing her residency, Emilia had to complete her social service working on an urban population project in which she saw to the medical needs of an independently living, elderly community. This experience “changed my perspective” she says, from seeing the elderly as a “vulnerable group that we have to take care of” to a “group who is well and capable ... but has specific needs” such as better access to medical attention.

This experience fueled Emilia’s desire to pursue a specialty degree in Geriatrics that medical specialty is still in its infancy in Mexico. In addition, to her degree in Geriatrics she decided to continue her academic career and pursue an MPH from the Instituto Nacional de Salud Pública (INSP) including one semester at BUSPH.

Now, Emilia’s focuses include palliative care and dialysis treatment of elderly patients with end-stage kidney disease as she works as a Geriatrician in the Mexican Social Security Institute ([IMSS](#)), one of the biggest health providers in Mexico. She also teaches at her former university, UAM. Her kind spirit and sincere passion for supporting and attending the aging population became evident as our discussion with her unraveled.

What about COVID and [Long-Term Care](#)?

On the topic of how coronavirus has affected every family, community, population globally [Emilia spoke about most vulnerable population](#): the elderly. The largest percentage of deaths due to COVID19 in Mexico as well as in the US have been in people over the age of 65. Crowded living conditions and in particular, large, intergenerational households are one of the reasons why infection rates among elderly are high in Mexico.

Not being able to be with the elderly family members during the pandemic due to the risk of infection has been hard on families and loved ones. Emilia believes that currently many families in Mexico, the USA, and elsewhere suffer from the pain of being separated or losing loved ones. She thinks that seeking professional support to address personal and community grief and trauma is one important part of our response to this crisis.

Emilia talked about her personal experiences caring for her grandparents, and emotions ran high when she mentioned that there is a lack of services in Mexico. Her family was struggling providing appropriate support and finding long-term solutions. She explained that her case is not an exception and that opportunities of professional care for elderly in Mexico are only slowly increasing in Mexico. Currently, most care of elderly in Mexico is

provided by family members who often suffer from the burden of caring, isolation and burn-out.

Emilia mentioned that she is often asked ‘Why do we even bother caring for the elder?’ As harsh as this question sounds, she thinks it is critical for societies, communities and families to answer this question. According to Emilia, a historical perspective is important: the [“Greatest” and “Silent” Generations](#) have gone through from wars to recessions to everything in between. Policies to modernize pension systems, professional social support and improve quality of care are critical elements to change the lives of elderly in Mexico.

A Post-Covid World...

The most valuable lesson from this pandemic, in the perspective of Emilia, is our ability and need to adapt and change the way we perceive and move in the world. Our relationship with the world, nature, and each other has drastically changed, and will forever be changed.

Overall, Emilia sees the tremendous contributions that public health professionals can make in shaping the post-COVID19 world. Hence, she believes that studying public health is now more relevant than ever. As we discussed, the privilege we hold, and our ability to learn and study public health, specifically at BUSPH, allows us to learn and grow from peers, faculty, and experiences, to eventually go out into the world and take our academic, professional, and personal experiences to make change and be the difference.

Before coming to BUSPH, Emilia discussed with us her anxiety with the language barrier and cultural differences, as she believes her fluency in English is not the strongest, yet her bravery, confidence, and commitment to the field of public health allowed her to overcome those anxieties and continue engaging with a culture outside of her own. Emilia Chino, a strong, confident, and brave female and professional in the field of public health, demonstrates her warm, sweet, and charismatic personality, in a way that instills hope in us graduate students for the future of Mexico, the field of public health, and the health of our world.