

Innovative rookies and seasoned professionals share their experiences.

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## A life-changing experience and a lifetime of dedication

By Robert Guerrero

I started my professional career in 1980 as a respiratory care practitioner (RCP) at Tucson Medical Center (TMC) in Tucson, Ariz. In 1992, TMC was actively working to establish relationships with physicians in Ciudad Obregon, Sonora, Mexico, and in the process of donating mechanical ventilators to one of the local hospitals. The TMC administration asked if there were any RCPs that would be willing to travel to Mexico to help train the physicians on how to use the donated equipment, and I immediately volunteered to do the training.

That was my first experience working with medical professionals from Mexico, and it was life changing. The physicians I met were appreciative not only for the donation, but because I had traveled to their city to help them understand how to use the equipment. I was treated with respect and gratitude.

Following that first international experience, I decided to return to school and in 1995 began working in corporate and affiliate services at TMC. Part of my charge was to work with the rural communities in Southern Arizona and oversee a customer service and referral office, working closely with Mexican colleagues throughout the states of Sonora and

Sinaloa. In addition, I represented TMC at the Health Services Committee (HSC) of the Arizona-Mexico Commission (AMC), a public-private organization chaired by the Arizona governor.

It was through the AMC HSC that I met Andy Nichols, a public health pioneer in Arizona's rural and border communities. With Dr. Nichols' guidance, I became an active member of the AMC HSC, allowing me to work closely with public health authorities in the state of Sonora. Following Dr. Nichols' death in 2001, I was appointed by Arizona Gov. Jane Hull to serve as the private sector co-chair of the AMC HSC.

My experiences as private sector co-chair gave me a much wider view of rural and binational health care and public health issues and led me to the understanding that we did not live in two separate states but instead in one region. In my current position, I am still in contact with many of the physicians I met back in 1992.

*Robert Guerrero is chief of the Arizona Department of Health Services Office of Border Health. He joined the National Rural Health Association in 2010.*

Are you relatively new to rural health or looking back on years of serving rural America?  
Email [editor@NRHArural.org](mailto:editor@NRHArural.org) if you'd like to share your story.