



NEWSLETTER

THE ASSOCIATION OF FORMER PAHO/WHO STAFF MEMBERS

VOL. XXXVII, No.1

MARCH 2026

www.afsmpaho.com



©Health Policy Watch

WHO Geneva Lowers USA Flag on Withdrawal

CONTENT

- Editorial
- Welcome to Our March Newsletter
- The Wonderful World of AFSM Newsletters
Thank You Marti and German!
- The Travel Adventures of Our Former
Editor-In-Chief
- The AFSM Newsletter
- Health Update
- New Year's Message from UN Joint Staff
Pension Fund
- Move a Little, Gain a Lot
- Marti Rice, Always a Colleague, Friend and
a Servant of Public Health
- Lima, a City Sensitive to Older Adults
- **Merciless** Hurricane Mellisa and Its Impact
on the People of Jamaica
- Lessons Learned by a Caregiver
- Testimony of an Exemplary Blood Donor
- Where Am I Now

Thank You Very Much!

By **Hernán Rosenberg**



As the Good Book states, there is a season for everything, and that includes saying goodbye. After well over 10 years, our editor-in-chief and our layout artist, Marilyn Rice and German Perdomo, have decided to lay down their pens (really their computer mice) and take a well-merited rest.

As anybody who looks at the last page can attest, the production of the newsletter involves several people, including many occasional collaborators submitting pieces or undertaking specific tasks, who are recognized in connection with that piece only. We are grateful for their help.

But Marti took her responsibilities with alacrity. The editor may not have much to write, but must make sure that the writers do, a sometimes very unpleasant task, or request changes, reject pieces, and even more unpleasant tasks. She never had any hesitation to nudge, diplomatically, but nevertheless firmly, call nag and cajole late producers to be able to issue the magazine on time and with appropriate contents. Being a professional procrastinator, I personally attest to her ability. But Marti also managed to modify both the contents and the intent of the newsletter, which, while maintaining the usual information streams we all appreciate (our most read section is in-memoriam, by the way), steered it into new areas, such as travel reports, healthy longevity and other relevant topics. And during her tenure we went digitally. Since current news was reported by other media, this meant more analytical pieces were needed. There were major changes especially considering our readership is not very eager for changes of any nature.

Of course, part of the appeal of the magazine is its good look. And here German provided a tremendous support, especially considering that he learnt design on his own. German has always had a natural curiosity for the application of modern technology into design, and here he found a niche that he covered beautifully, doing things with his Apple computer that most of us would not have thought possible. Not bad for a physician specializing in public health.

In addition, both acted at one point or another as editors in their respective languages, even if unsolicited, always making useful suggestions to authors to improve readability and understanding of their pieces. All this was silent and unseen by most of us and done with grace and tact.

We will introduce the new guard in a later issue, because the purpose of this editorial is to say goodbye and thank Marti and German, but we also want to thank Gloria Coe who is acting as interim editor while the changes take place. As usual, please consider giving some of your time to the Association, either in the newsletter or any other activity.

We are looking forward to changes in looks and approaches in future issues. Please rest assured you will continue receiving timely, relevant, and important information from AFSM.

We wish the best to Marti and German (and hope to see them around with all the wisdom they have accumulated), and, as Julio Iglesias reminds us:

“Al final, las obras quedan, las gentes se van, otros que siguen, las continuarán, la vida sigue igual”.
"In the end, works remain, people leave, others who follow will continue, life remains the same."

Welcome to Our March Newsletter

By Gloria Coe, Guest Editor



With our March Newsletter, we celebrate many years of excellence and dedication by **Marilyn “Marti” Rice**, **German Perdomo**, and their generous team of collaborators who support the Newsletter and our AFSM/PAHO family.

Marti retired from PAHO in 2012. Soon afterward, she was asked to become the Editor-in-Chief of our Newsletter, a responsibility she graciously accepted. Fourteen years later, she is now stepping down from that role. Fortunately for all of us, Marti will continue to support the Newsletter by translating articles from Spanish to English.

During these 14 years, Marti brought together a wonderful and dedicated team of supporters to plan, edit, design, and produce our quarterly Newsletter. We are deeply grateful for their generosity and for the careful work they carry out—often quietly behind the scenes—volunteering both their time and their expertise. Among them are:

- **Matilde Pinto**, who edits articles written in Spanish and translates articles from English to Spanish.
- **Carol Burgher**, who edits articles in English.
- **German Perdomo**, who reviews and at times edits submissions and designs the layout of the Newsletter.

Over the years, many others have also volunteered their time and expertise to help edit and translate submissions. We gratefully acknowledge their many contributions across the months and years.

We would also like to express our deep appreciation to **German**, who after ten years is stepping down from his role supporting AFSM through the design and layout of the Newsletter. In addition to this important work, German served as President of AFSM/PAHO from 2014 to 2018. His dedication, creativity, and commitment have been invaluable to our community, and we thank him warmly for his many contributions. The first three articles in this Newsletter look back historically over the past fourteen years of our publication and celebrate the wonderful articles and authors who have enriched its pages.

Mena Carto, our AFSM focal point in Guyana, offers a heartwarming reflection on these years. Her article presents a written history of our Newsletter and reminds us that former staff members continue to be thinkers, storytellers, and creators who cherish both the memory of PAHO and the bonds within our extended family. Looking back over a decade and a half, we share in the joy of countless stories, thoughtful and thought-provoking articles, and the quiet, consistent passion of our contributing authors.

Yvette Holder, coordinator of the Christmas celebration for former staff from the English-speaking Caribbean, writes about Marti’s fourteen years of travel, wanderlust, learning, and discovery as chronicled in our Newsletter. Through Yvette’s reflections, we accompany Marti on her global journeys and see distant places through her words and pictures.

Nancy Berinstein, Marilyn and German, also contributed an article recalling the earlier days of the Newsletter, including the processes of writing and reviewing articles, designing, producing, and distributing each issue. It is fascinating to see how much these processes have evolved over the years.

Throughout this issue, you will also find brief notes of thanks sent by former staff members who remember the challenges and joys of working together with Marti or German. We are grateful to them for sharing their warm reflections.

This brief historical section is followed by articles from members of the Board and from the wider AFSM family. We look forward to continuing to receive and share your articles, photographs, and artistic contributions in the years ahead.

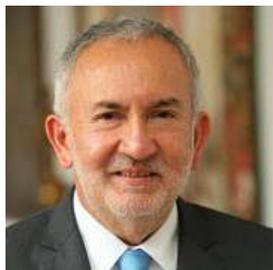
As Hernán mentions in his Editorial, we will introduce the new guard of the Newsletter team in a future issue.

Welcome to our new member!

Adriana Blanco, Uruguay

Germán Perdomo, A Public Health Gentleman

By Juan Manuel Sotelo



I met Germán in La Paz in late 1989, when I was leaving my post as PAHO/WHO Country Representative in Bolivia and Germán was taking over. The transition lasted only a few days, during which I had the opportunity to introduce the new representative to national authorities, colleagues at PAHO/WHO, and stakeholders in international cooperation, the diplomatic corps, and civil society, including the People's Health Committees. Germán had long hair, just like me, a product of our generation. A new representative, with a relaxed demeanor, not particularly fond of ties, who informed the Minister of Health at a luncheon I hosted

that he did not drink alcohol. He raised expectations of a new era in cooperation with that country. I left for Mexico to assume my new duties as PAHO/WHO Country Representative there, and after completing that role, I landed at headquarters in Washington, D.C., in the Office of Analysis and Strategic Planning, where Germán was one of the leading thinkers in that important office. We were tasked with organizing the technical discussions together, preparing the Organization's programmatic guidelines and priorities, the basis of the budget, and acting as the Secretariat of the Director's Cabinet.

Over time, my knowledge and appreciation of Germán deepened, recognizing his talents and commitment to the tasks he undertook. Later, in his capacity as leader of AFSM, I witnessed his dedication and commitment to all of us, including his invaluable contributions to the Newsletter and all its editorial aspects. My affection and gratitude go out to Germán and Ana María.



Working with Marti at PAHO in the early 2000s

By Patty Owen

I was extremely fortunate to have worked with Marti at PAHO in the early 2000s. It was an exciting time in global health promotion, and we played an important role with our work on the healthy municipalities program. Although there were many challenges (e.g., convincing local governments to commit to action, finalizing a user-friendly toolkit for mayors, determining valid indicators- qualitative and quantitative- for evaluating local action, etc.), we made meaningful progress with the publication and distribution of useful material. Marti was an incredibly hard worker who never wavered in her commitment to public health. She was an inspirational colleague whose great sense of humor and joyful presence made me thoroughly enjoy my time working with her, and I am grateful to count her as a friend.

The Wonderful World of AFSM Newsletters Thank You Marti and German!

By Mena Carto, Focal Point, Guyana



So, it is the end of one quarter of the year, and we are awaiting the beginning of the next quarter. And I am waiting in 'delicious anticipation' for the next issue of the AFSM newsletter, with all its juicy stories and wonderful tidbits. So, when Marti shares it, I save it on my computer

desktop and savor the moment when I would read it, curled up in my recliner with a cup of coffee in hand, while I read the stories that keep us all connected as former staff members of the PAHO/WHO family. Former staff who now live in various parts of the globe. But distance does not matter because we have a universal connector – the wonderful world of the AFSM newsletters! The newsletter that brings us all together to share our experiences and to reminisce on times past by delving into the annals of history – PAHO and otherwise. A newsletter that is full of colorful stories of our exotic travels throughout the globe, which delve into different cultures and that make you feel as if you were there. A newsletter that binds us all together as members of the same family. In the words of our AFSM President Hernan Rosenberg, "The AFSM PAHO newsletter strengthens ties that bind us together.... our Newsletter is clearly the pride and joy of AFSM both in the Americas and on the Global Stage." What a wonderful medium of communication the AFSM newsletter is!



And who is the architect of the newsletter? Well, it has been Marti for the past 14 years!! Marti has been the faithful and dedicated editor who issues the call for articles, suggests wide-ranging themes, pursues the potential writers, reminds them of deadlines, assists in translating and editing their articles, and so on.... This humungous task she has done masterfully and voluntarily for 14 years, while German Perdomo continues to do the beautiful layout of the newsletter! Marti has chosen to move on as editor BUT, she is not leaving us entirely. She will still be part of the editorial team, and she will continue to contribute significantly. Thank you Marti, sincerely!

As you know, our newsletter has some standard headings – Editorial, Health and Pension Updates, Credit Union updates, and other PAHO-related administrative issues that are key for keeping us in the loop on ‘important things that we need to know.’ It also captures the various AFSM luncheons held in Washington over the years, pictures of the attendees and as Hernan says, these occasions provide a forum where ‘friendships are rediscovered.’ What I find most fascinating however, are the other evolving themes that Marti has managed to incorporate into the newsletters over the years and that have kept us riveted... here are some of them.

I will start with the global travel of our AFSM members. Have you ever read the story of someone’s travels and felt as if you were in the countries that they are describing? Well Marti’s write-ups of her own travels do that to me. Marti is a prolific traveler who has covered tin different corners of the globe and who has visited the most exotic countries of the world.



Khujand, Turkestan

And when she writes, she tells you every detail about the culture of that country, she includes the most lifelike and colourful photographs, she tells you about the foods that she ate, and you can actually taste the food. I found her ‘Journey on the Silk Road’ to be most exotic when she visited the four ‘stans’ in central Asia - Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan. We heard all about their religion and customs, beliefs and practices, food and markets, architecture, craftsmanship and artistry, and music and dance.

Then there was her trip to Argentina and Chile, wending her way around bustling Buenos Aires seeing major sites, sampling the cuisine, then moving onto the contrasting desert-like less populated Calafate, Patagonia, and the sites in Chile. Then there was her trip to Antarctica with its exquisite

nature - the icebergs, the glaciers, the seals, the whales, and the penguins jumping in the water like low flying fish to get from one place to another. Then there was her trip to Hudson Bay and the Polar Bears and the log cabin that she stayed in.



South Georgia Island, Argentina

I looove the coziness of log cabins and I could actually feel the warmth of the fireplace in the cabin. Then there was Marti’s’ recent visit to Christiania in Copenhagen, Denmark. Marti’s account of the community that started with the creation of small villages that had the goal of having a society based on peace and love, led you to believe that Utopia is possible. And I can go on and on about Marti’s travels and those of other AFSM members, but I will stop here less I bore you.

Other themes of the newsletter that I found most entrancing were ‘Where are They Now’ and ‘Age Liberation.’ Listening to the accounts of how the lives of our former colleagues evolved since leaving PAHO and how they were coping with aging, made us feel as if we were sharing in their life’s experiences. Many of our retirees have moved back to their home countries and while some have moved on to other form of employment, a common theme that emerged was their reconnection with their family members – siblings, children, and most of all their grandchildren. Many spoke of the joys of grand parenthood and the pampering that they dished out to this generation. Many also got into travelling, volunteer work, practicing art, writing poetry, healthy eating, exercising, gardening and other

things. It was a joy to listen to our very own Sir George Alleyne, former PAHO/WHO Director, who spoke about his excursions into cooking, his proud pursuits into gardening and his quotation that “To garden is to patiently, lovingly, and diligently help life flourish in the ground and above it.”



Sam presenting his book with Yvette

Then there was Sam Rawlings who after retirement became involved in large scale farming and who was offering us retirees ‘expert advice on farming.’ Then there were the retirees who authored books about their lives. Sir George wrote on “The Grooming of a Vice Chancellor”, Sam wrote the ‘Autobiography of Samuel Rawlings: From Shepherd Boy in the Frigate Bay Hills to Prominent World Scientist,’ and Sumedha (Mona) Khanna wrote about “Dancing Feet in a Man’s World.” Their stories were captivating! A saying that however remained etched in my memory was when under the theme ‘Where are They Now’, retiree Christian Darras wrote “in the great book of life, retirement is a new chapter: its blank pages are to be written day by day, giving way to its inspiration”. What lovely words when we reflect on retirement!

Then we are brought back to reality – at this stage of life, we are all aging! Thus emerged the ongoing theme of ‘Healthy Aging’. Martha Pelaez, former advisor on Healthy Aging, among others, continue to do an excellent job of writing about the need to age in a healthy manner by staying connected and engaged, maintaining cognitive function, doing exercises, eating a healthy

diet, etc. Gloria Coe wrote on ‘Let’s Eat 30 Different Plants Each Week’ to ensure a healthy gut and an effective response to the immune system. Then there is the mind-boggling issue of whether dementia is inevitable in old age, and whether physical disabilities are a fact of aging. The harsh reality of ageism we are confronted with, along with its stereotyping, prejudices, and discrimination against the elderly. What also came to light is the gender disparity in aging – the tendency of women to be less financially viable than men when they age. Mona Khanna also shared with us some very insightful stories on her journeys in the aging process. She dwelt on the importance of staying connected, the importance of having purpose in life during retirement, how to cope as seniors in solo aging, coping with challenges during the aging process, the need to be at peace with oneself, letting go of material things and very importantly, preparing for end of life – something that many of us avoid. Retiree Atul Gawande in his book ‘Being Mortal: Medicine and What Matters in the End’ suggests that among life’s most important roles, “for both the dying and those left behind, is to help people end their stories on their own terms.” He reminds us that, “What matters in the end is not how we die but how we live.”

Yvette Holder’s many episodes on the ‘Musings of an Aging Woman’ had me in stitches. It is a good thing to be able to laugh at oneself as Yvette did in her articles – otherwise we would cry. Yvette recounted hilarious stories about her personal challenges as an aging woman and how she deals with these.

She told us about how to practice getting up from the floor when you fall, how to mind your tongue when you speak with your grown-up children and their spouses, and how much better it is to live in your own space rather than with your children.

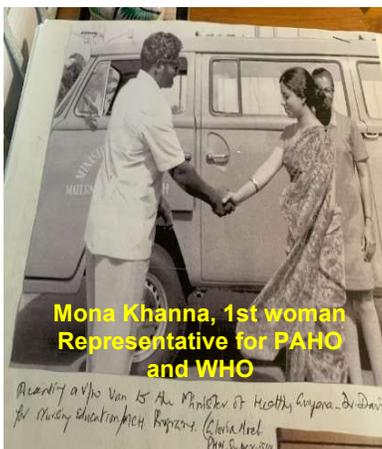
She told us not to stop doing the things that you really enjoy, once you are physically able. And if you are no longer physically able, how to find ways of improvising. Among the humorous parts of Yvette’s stories was her ability to have constant audible conversations with her oneself – to speak and respond to her oneself, even within earshot of others who might well think that she is dementic. One of her most amusing episodes was her adventure with the scooter that she had acquired to get around, given her

limited mobility. After repeatedly colliding with numerous obstacles in her path, the final straw was when in maneuvering a turn, the scooter capsized, she was thrown into a thick clump of bushes, she was enveloped by the bushes and unable to get up and could not be found by the 'search team'. Her only saving grace was her cell phone which she luckily managed to have on her person!

Another colourful aspect of the newsletter is the inclusion of personal stories of members in their early lives, and especially in relation to the traditional medicine that was practised in the remote villages that they grew up in. There was the story by Maria Edith Baca on 'My Mother the Midwife' in which she told of how her mother became a midwife in her very remote village, how she single-handedly and skillfully brought the village babies into the world, and how she improvised in the absence of modern medicine. Then there was the story of 'Grandma Tales' by Helena Restrepo who spoke of her grandma as the village "medical expert," who used very traditional methods to treat health issues – including using a pair of pliers to extract teeth. Helena also told a touching 'Short Story of Shared Living' in which she spoke of real-life episodes that she experienced while living with alzheimeric companions in a modern home for the elderly. There were also other touching stories from AFSM members who spoke of taking care of their developmentally or physically challenged child or spouse.



Yvette Holder



Mona Khanna, 1st woman Representative for PAHO and WHO

A very uplifting story was that written by Mona Khanna in which she spoke of her journey through PAHO and WHO – how she broke the glass-ceiling by being the first woman selected to be both PAHO and WHO Country Representative and later, as Chief of a major division in the Regional Office. Her story was very inspirational, and it urges women to see the sky as their limit when looking at career upliftment. Mona also wrote 'A Personal Reflection about the Corona Virus Pandemic' – an article that brought out some soul-searching questions about life and the continuation of survival against great odds. Then there was the humorous story of an AFSM member who preferred to just label herself as a 'hot retiree.' She wrote the story of a 'hot retiree' who was searching for a male companion. Her account of trying numerous dating apps to find a partner was hilarious to say the least. In her futile attempts, she only came up with guys who

were either con artists, liars, criminals, and those pretending to be younger or more handsome than they were!

I too added my own stories to the newsletters. Apart from contributing to 'Age Liberation' and 'Where are They Now,' I wrote on our numerous annual virtual Caribbean Christmas parties that brought together online the Caribbean retirees in raucous, fun-filled moments of reconnecting, carol singing, joking and laughter. I also wrote on my language immersion escapade in Colombia. But a special occasion that I wrote on and that would always remind me of Marti's generosity was when she offered her home in Florida for a group of Floridian retirees to have a reunion at her home. I was co-organizer along with Yvette Holder and so I was 'adopted' as a temporary Floridian even though I live in Guyana. Marti and I had never met physically but only interacted as members of the AFSM Board, yet she wholeheartedly opened her home to me as her house guest. I was treated like a queen by herself and husband Frank and so I was co-hostess on the day of the actual reunion. It was a memorable day when stalwarts such as Sam Rawlings and wife Joan, Yvette Holder, Raymond Reid, Harry Phillipeaux, Martha Pelaez, Marti and husband Frank, and of course me, spent hours delving into memory lane and sharing in food, family, and fun.

And finally, there is the sobering heading of 'In memoriam' in the newsletter. This reminds us of the stark reality that we will all go to the great beyond one day. Among those that were written about was

the late former PAHO/WHO Director, Carissa Etienne. Her passing was a shock! She had barely retired from PAHO. She did not have the time to enjoy her retirement – to tour the world, to plant her kitchen garden, to indulge in her hobbies, to have grandchildren, to lounge in her rocking chair, or to write her memoirs. Alas, she was gone too soon. And so, this reminds us of the world famous saying that says ‘we should enjoy every day as if it is the last day of our lives.’



On that note, I will now close my epistle by saying a final thank you to Marti for her 14 years of dedicated service as the editor of our newsletter. Thank you for continuously keeping us connected. THANK YOU! THANK YOU! THANK YOU! from the very bottom of our hearts!

Marilyn (Marti) Rice

By **Cris Franceschini, Universidad de Sao Paulo**

Working with Marti at PAHO was both a privilege and a formative experience in my professional life. From the very beginning of my career, she combined high standards with genuine generosity, always encouraging me to think more strategically while creating space to learn, question, and grow. Over the many years we worked together, we faced many challenges, but what stands out most is the joy of building meaningful work in a collaborative and supportive environment.

Beyond her professional excellence, what stays with me most is Marti's humanity: her attentiveness, her quiet encouragement, and her ability to see potential even before one fully sees it in oneself. She was key to my professional development, and I remain deeply grateful for her mentorship, her trust, and the opportunities she created. I also deeply cherish the personal relationship we have continued to build beyond our professional work. Marti has always made a point of staying in touch—remembering special dates, sharing news, and showing genuine interest in my life. I deeply value hearing about her and her family and cherish our continued connection despite the distance.

The Travel Adventures of Our Former Editor-in-Chief

By Yvette Holder



Marilyn Rice, known to her friends as Marti, assumed the mantle of Editor-in-Chief of the PAHO/AFSM Newsletter in 2012 upon the retirement of Nancy Berenstein. However, it was not until 2017, five years later, that she began to share her travel adventures with her readers. And for the next eight years, we vicariously lived adventurously through her stories.

We start in Alaska where Marti and her beloved Frank, used every form of transportation to explore all that Alaska had to offer. They walked, they drove, they bussed, they rode the train, they sailed, they rafted and they even took a ride in a small plane to have a close-up view of bears fishing for salmon. They visited the towns of Ketchikan, Juneau, Skagway, Anchorage and Fairbanks and were able to see native life and culture first-hand – hunting, fishing, food preparation and preservation, and dog sledding. They viewed Alaskan nature – flora and fauna (bears, reindeer, bald eagles, moose, nimble Dali sheep on the hillsides, sea otters and whales), and calving glaciers. Strike one off her bucket list!



I don't know if the Alaskan trip intensified Marti's fascination with bears but sometime afterward, she took a trip to Churchill, a sub-Arctic town in the Canadian province of Manitoba that is considered the polar bear capital of the world, where one can observe polar bears in the wild as they migrate to the shore of the Hudson Bay to hunt seals. Interaction between bears and humans can be quite close to the point where there are constant polar



bear patrols and "recalcitrant" bears are tranquilized and housed at the "polar bear jail" until they can be released into the wild. Indeed, Marti, while breakfasting, saw a bear wander into town and through the school playground. Patrol agents could not persuade him to leave town, so he was thrown into jail. Most interactions, however, are less intimate and well controlled. To see the bears more closely in the wild, Marti ventured out into the wilderness in a "tundra buggy", a raised amphibious vehicle that is great for negotiating the terrain and provides protected viewing opportunities of the animals.

The excitement in Churchill did not end there. Marti mushed (rode a dog sled) for two miles over tundra trails. She visited the Inuit museum and learnt about culture and history of the people. She also learnt about the non-profit organization, Polar Bear International, which seeks to preserve the bears' habitat and conserve their populations that are threatened with extinction. There was too, the Churchill Northern Studies Centre, a non-profit research and educational facility that supports observational and scientific studies on subjects relevant to the area, including on beluga whales, another feature of Hudson Bay life. And one more for the bucket list – seeing the whales! I must mention the overnight stop in Winnipeg where she visited the Human Rights Museum with its displays relating to the rights of indigenous Canadians, genocides and other historical human rights events, a poignant reflection in these current times.

After an enforced hiatus, thanks to COVID, Marti resumed her travels, this time visiting the southern end of the world. From the Arctic to the Antarctic! This was the last continent she was yet to explore, that was still on her bucket list. Starting in Argentina, Marti hiked the Tierra del Fuego National Park before embarking on a 3-week voyage in the Southern Ocean through the Drake Passage and traversing the South Shetland Islands to the Antarctic Peninsula, onto South Georgia Island and thence to the Falkland Islands for the return journey to Buenos Aires. During this trip, she was escorted by dolphins, dodged floes and icebergs, escaped the 18-36 foot waves that are the norm for the



merging of the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, and was awed by the breathtaking landscape of huge glaciers, ice shelves and magnificent ice cliffs that descend dramatically into the sea, not to mention the variety of marine life (mammalian and avian) including albatrosses and several species of penguins, seals and whales. Marti also recounted for us, the natural, physical and geopolitical history of the region, among them its past volcanic activity and its economic importance to whaling and sealing historically and biodiversity exploration and tourism more recently.

A few months later, Marti returned to Argentina for a trip that included Chile this time and opportunities for more cultural activities and the further enjoyment of the region's glacial landscape. She learnt to tango and shared the enthusiasm of Argentines as they battled (and defeated) Australia in the quarter-final of the World Cup and again when they won the Cup. She immersed herself in the history and culture of her environment, conversing with a filmmaker whose product captured the terror of the dictatorship, wandering through street markets, squares (one of which is the site of protest by women against the disappearance of their children during the troubled times), historic sites like the Opera House and Eva Peron's grave, museums and gardens (especially the Rose Garden in Buenos Aires), admiring the murals on buildings, paying homage to roadside shrines erected to Gauchito Gil by pouring beer on the ground and best of all, sampling the local cuisine (Argentinian mate and Calafate ice-cream, to mention a few). But Marti's true love of nature is expressed in describing the land and sea experiences of the region – from her excursion to the UNESCO World Heritage Glaciers National Park where she could see and hear the glacier calve as the ice breaks off and crashes into the water, then crossing into Chile to hike the UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve at the Torres del Paine National Park with its rivers, valleys, lakes, waterfalls, glaciers, and distinctively-shaped mountains which are home to beautiful vegetation some of which began to bloom for Marti, and animals such as pumas and the nursing guanaco that Marti was fortunate to spot. After the Park, the sea adventure began, sailing through the Straits of Magellan and various channels, past several glaciers, across the Bay, to Cape Horn, back through Nassau Bay to return to Argentina, stopping en route at islets and bays to view the vegetation and the wildlife, especially the Magellanic penguins. Strike two off the bucket list!!



The last great adventure of her bucket list as related by Marti, was her journey on the Silk Road. This was the route along which the silk trade was plied, bringing the commodity from China where it was produced, across Central Asia to Italy and Greece in Europe where it was in demand for luxury clothing. Marti described for us the geopolitical history of the route. It was not one road but more a network of caravan tracts as merchants travelled in packs for safety. The route was a long one with the main hub

1600 miles long spanning 34 countries and taking a year to complete. While spice may have been the impetus for the trade, the route became a highway for the transport of much more – other products were traded in both directions, east-west and west-east, ideas, inventions, ideologies and religions, some backed by military force that did not exclude genocide. Marco Polo, Genghis Khan, Buddhism, Islam and communism all travelled the Silk Road, as did gunpowder, paper and diseases. Trade along the silk road was a mixed blessing.

Marti visited five of the “Stans” of Central Asia – Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan) and shared with us the religious and cultural practices of the different countries. Zoroastrianism is the main religion of the nomadic tribes of the north while Buddhism is the religion of choice in the south, which is until the Arabs and then Genghis Khan and the Mongols invaded. Now Islam is the main religion although Judaism still survives in Uzbekistan so that Marti was able to see one of the first Qurans and one of oldest Torahs both in Uzbekistan. Religion is also reflected in the beautiful architecture of the palaces, monasteries, mosques, synagogues and cathedrals with their intricate wood carvings and artistic ceramic mosaic tiling. With a history of beliefs in natural elements like sun, water, air and earth, it is no surprise that superstition is rife so that amulets with eyes are worn or hung over doorways as protection against the evil eye.

Arranged marriages are still common and bride kidnapping, once the main way of getting a wife, is less practiced, though mostly in Kyrgyzstan. Women’s roles are shaped by religion and society’s practical needs and some of this is reflected in their artistic and skillful weavings and embroidery, some techniques of which are unique to certain areas. Silk, brocade and carpet weavings are not the only talents of this region. The men also exhibit their skills, not only in mosaic work and woodcarving (already hinted at in the architecture), but also blacksmithing and silversmithing. The region is as famous for its knives as it is for its rugs. As rich as the handicraft artistry of the region is its music, Pamir music, that is traditional to an ethnic group in the Pamir mountains of Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan and China. Marti was able to view their unique string, wind and percussion instruments on display in the museum, in performance (along with dance) and even in their construction.



Central to any region’s description is its food which Marti related with lots of pictures. This region’s diet, influenced by its many invaders and traders, was Chinese, Persian, Russian, Turkish and Mongol. Their bread-making where the round breads are stamped with special designs particular to each artisan and thrown against the inner walls of round wood-burning ovens to bake, is very similar to the tandoori style of making naan. Rice seemed to be a staple with plov (a rice dish of meat, chickpeas, and carrots), being the national dish of Uzbekistan. Fresh and dried fruits, vegetables, meat (especially beef and lamb) and spices are sold in outdoor markets.

While the Silk Road may have been the last related adventure of her bucket list, Marti also travelled through Europe with interesting adventures in Oslo, Norway where she visited the Noble Peace Centre and saw the changing of the Royal Guard, and in Copenhagen, Denmark, where she visited Freedom Christiania, a community of about 900 people that is a model of socialism based on simple, specific, egalitarian rules, established to achieve a goal of “creating a society that depends on itself and strives through a common effort to ward off any psychological and physical pollution”. This was Marti’s glimpse at a fantasy of living in a commune.

As I read Marti’s accounts of her travels, I was struck yet again by how much more alike than different, we, as human beings are, with similarly adaptive human responses to common natural challenges. For

example, with simple substitutions, plov could be a Trini pelau, and one-pot rice dishes are common throughout all cultures e.g. pilaf, paella, risotto. Or to quote a Caribbean saying, “the more things change, the more they stay the same”.

The AFSM PAHO Newsletter

By Nancy Berinstein, German Perdomo, and Marilyn (Marti) Rice

With the publication of this issue, Marti Rice will be stepping down from her role as Editor-in-Chief. For the past 14 years, she has served the Association with dedication and very hard work. Together with former AFSM President and Newsletter Coordinator Nancy Berinstein and former AFSM President German Perdomo, Marti shared successes and many challenges in the development of the AFSM Newsletter.

The Early “Golden Years.” From the earliest days of the Association of Former PAHO/WHO Staff Members (AFSM), there has been a Newsletter. Its first pilot issue was published in September 1990. In it the declared purpose was “to maintain a link between its members and PAHO/WHO but, more importantly, to create close ties of companionship, fraternity, and camaraderie amongst its fellow members.” It also reflected warmly: “Our years of work together are like a life lived with a Family which we cannot and should not erase from our hearts.”



The newsletter was originally published in English, in black and white, and kept members informed about happenings at PAHO/WHO and among colleagues. PAHO graciously provided facilities for printing and distribution at no cost to the Association. Copies were mailed to members in the United States and Canada, and articles were primarily written by Board members in English. Jean Surgi and AFSM President Jaime Ayalde played particularly important roles in generating interest in the Association and maintaining contact with former members of the PAHO family. Dr. Carlyle Guerra de Macedo, Director of PAHO, provided meeting rooms, equipment, facilities, and financial assistance.

Over time, the Board worked actively with PWRs to include AFSM members in Spanish-speaking countries. By 1999, the newsletter featured articles in both English and Spanish, published in their original languages. By the early 2000’s, the newsletter had become fully bilingual. It was mailed via the U.S.A. Postal Service and PAHO’s diplomatic pouch to PWRs and sent to members throughout the Region.

Formalizing the Newsletter Structure (2003–2012): Dr. Mirta Roses became PAHO’s Director in 2003. Her administration generously provided AFSM with a donation to support operating expenses. PAHO continued to offer invaluable support through its Translation Unit and Mail Room for printing, collating, and mailing newsletters. An outside consultant handled layout and design. Board members gathered in the Delegate’s Lounge to stuff hundreds of newsletters into envelopes for distribution throughout the Region via PAHO’s mailing system. Jan Barahona served as Coordinator of the Newsletter Committee until 2005 at which time Nancy Berinstein became President of AFSM and eventually Coordinator of the Newsletter. She served in those positions for the next ten years.

Transition and Financial Challenges (2012–2015): When Dr. Carissa Etienne became PAHO’s Director in 2013, the Organization was facing financial constraints and could no longer provide financial

assistance to AFSM or support of its Translation Unit and Mail Room. AFSM President Nancy Berinstein located an outside printing firm to print and collate the newsletter. She personally transported printed copies to PAHO, where Board members labeled envelopes for mailing. Because AFSM now assumed mailing costs, the outside layout and design consultant was canceled. The sustainability of the newsletter as a communication tool was being tested.

Nancy welcomed Marti Rice to the Association in 2012. Marti soon moved into the position of Editor-In-Chief and like a hero stepping forward at just the right moment, Marti helped guide the newsletter on a new path. A team of native Spanish-speaking AFSM members was assembled to translate English articles to Spanish. Jean Surgi continued editing English articles until her passing when Marti assumed this responsibility and German Perdomo edited the Spanish articles. The goal was to maintain bilingual integrity.



German Perdomo

Entering the Digital Age: In 2015, AFSM gradually entered the digital age and German Perdomo assumed responsibility for the Presidency of AFSM at an opportune time. Printing and mailing costs were becoming unsustainable; the decision was made to produce the newsletter electronically and distribute via email and the website. German continued to edit Spanish articles and assumed for 10 years and 38 newsletters the role of electronic formatting, expansion of themes and incorporating great photographs and Internet links. As President, German recognized that not all members have online access and continued printing copies to be mailed on request. With the support of Cristina Torres, the team initiated a shift to email which also allowed for “blast” messages to be sent by Antonio Hernandez to our members. This increased the number of AFSM members who expressed interest in writing articles for English and Spanish Newsletters, significantly increasing both the quantity and quality of contributions.

Managing multiple translators for English-to-Spanish articles proved to be a mammoth task requiring ongoing vigilance. Victoria Imas-Duchovny, German Perdomo, and Marti Rice acted as editors/translators. More recently Matilde Pinto accepted the role to edit articles written in Spanish and translate English articles to Spanish. This greatly simplified Marti’s responsibilities as Editor-in-Chief and ensured greater consistency of the Spanish Newsletter. Carol Burgher assumed the role of doing an excellent job of editing English articles. With the December 2025 issue, German Perdomo transferred layout responsibilities for both the Spanish and English Newsletters. Once finalized, the newsletter is emailed to PAHO and Global AFSM members and staff. Violeta Mata Garcia posts it on the AFSM website, and Antonio Hernandez distributes the link to the Newsletters via a blast email to all members who register their email address with AFSM.

The digital age has given AFSM a broader reach. With Focal Points now in many countries, the richness and diversity of contributions have expanded tremendously. The future looks bright, and we confidently expect even stronger newsletters ahead.

The newsletter remains one of AFSM’s most important tools for staying connected with members and providing a space for everyone to contribute - just as it set out to do in September 1990. The Association extends its heartfelt thanks to Marti Rice and German Perdomo for their many years providing our members with their exceptional contributions and generous support.

Looking Ahead: Over more than three decades, the AFSM Newsletter has evolved from a modest black-and-white bulletin to a fully bilingual colorful digital publication with region-wide participation. It

has weathered administrative transitions, financial constraints, and technological transformations - sustained always by volunteer dedication and a shared commitment to community.

After ten years as the layout artist of our Newsletters and President of the Association for four years, German is transferring these responsibilities to a new younger team dedicated to continuing to support our Association and members.

After 14 years as Editor-in-Chief, Marti now steps down in March 2026 as a new team of recently joined AFSM members assumes leadership.

And so, the story continues.

Working with German

By Rigoberto Centeno

I met Germán Perdomo initially and very briefly, on a short mission I made to Bolivia under the mandate of the WHO Intensive Cooperation Programme; the pleasant thing was that everyone in the health sector in Bolivia knew and respected him.

Later, I was transferred from DOR to Peru. There, we both worked on the development of health systems and services with Germán providing clear leadership in health policy and the reform agenda. I worked on various operational initiatives with both the IPSS (Peruvian Social Security Institute) and the Peruvian Ministry of Health and its regional offices. Together, we made significant progress on a major agenda. With the approval of the decentralization law, we improved the autonomy and management capacity of the regions, initiated a strong effort in primary health care in social security, fostered coordination between the IPSS and the Ministry of Health, and supported the approval of the Law for Local Management of Community Health Centers (CLASS), among other things. In a way, Germán was a door opener for me. He was easy to get along with, courteous, a great listener—attentive to opinions—and very diplomatic. I considered him a born diplomat. He had a great ability to explain complex topics and concepts simply, was a generous friend, a loyal colleague, and enjoyed teamwork. He immediately inspired trust. I was not much of a team player and wanted things done quickly. In our regular coordination meetings, he would have a suggestion for me to continue or improve. One of them, which I remember vividly and which stuck with me, was: "Rigoberto, in this job we can't be lone rangers!"

Health Update

By Carol Collado



Continuing with the format of the last several Newsletters, we will begin with health topics in the news.

PAHO issued two epidemiological alerts for the Region of the Americas in February, the first for measles and the second on Chikungunya.

Measles: The incidence of identified measles cases in a Region thought to be measles free has jumped exponentially in 2025 and 2026. In 2025 there were 14,891 confirmed cases including twenty-nine deaths across thirteen countries with Mexico, Canada, the USA, and Bolivia showing the highest numbers. The numbers show a 32-fold increase from 466 cases

reported in 2024. In the first 3 weeks of 2026, 1031 measles cases were confirmed in seven countries, reporting a 43-fold increase compared with twenty-three cases reported in the same period of 2025!

Evidence shows that 78% were unvaccinated with an additional 11% with unknown vaccination status. Additional information shows the youngest age groups were most affected. Lack of confidence in the health system in general, and vaccines in particular since the COVID epidemic, have led many parents to unfortunately refuse vaccines. Although there has been some improvement during the past year, measles vaccinations remain below the suggested target to give community protection.

Chikungunya is a virus transmitted by *Aedes aegypti* and potentially *Aedes albopictus* mosquitoes, which also spread dengue, Zika, and other arboviruses. Infection can cause high fever and severe joint pain, often debilitating, along with muscle pain, headache, fatigue, nausea, and rash. Other, non-articular symptoms can range from mild to severe, with higher risk in children under one-year, older adults, people with underlying health conditions, and pregnant women. In the Americas, during 2025 over 300,000 cases were reported in eighteen countries with 170 deaths. There is a concern that there has been a rise in cases in areas that have been free from the virus for years. For example, Guyana, French Guiana, and Suriname confirmed a resumption of transmission after a decade without reported cases. There are increased concerns due to climate change, more cases attributed to the *Aedes albopictus*, a newer carrier added to the more prevalent *Aedes aegypti*.

Given that this disease is mosquito borne, use of repellents, bed nets and clothing that covers arms and legs is recommended. Key public health measures to reduce Chikungunya are to avoid known infested areas at dawn and dusk and ensure infected individuals use bed nets and have minimal contact with others.

Dengue, another mosquito spread virus, continues to be a threat to health. Depending on location, the southern hemisphere has higher levels of dengue during the first half of the year, while the northern hemisphere is higher in the latter half of the year. As mentioned in previous newsletters, due to climate change, the disease is showing more evidence further north. Although there are several different genotypes or strains of the virus, new studies indicate the vaccine is effective.

COVID-19: Two and a half years after WHO announced the end of the emergency phase of COVID-19, the virus continues to circulate worldwide, though current evidence indicates relatively stable trends. A recent addition to the Covid 19 diagnostic tools is the rapid antigen test that provides results in 15-30 minutes, can be used at home, and has been useful in areas with scarce laboratory services.

Long COVID can damage the brain, heart, blood vessels, and immune system long after infection and affects an estimated sixty-five million people worldwide. Researchers now link symptoms to lingering viruses, inflammation, micro-clots, and disrupted energy metabolism. Other contributing factors include autoimmunity, disruptions in gut bacteria, and impaired mitochondrial function. Recent investigations identified molecular differences in immune response for those who have developed long Covid after a mild to moderate case of Covid19. One of the most active areas of research appears to be the early reduction of inflammation. Although many potential treatments show early promise, most evidence continues to come from small or open-label studies that rely on indirect outcome measures. Until clearer answers emerge, experts support a flexible, team-based approach that includes early antiviral use, carefully graded exercise, targeted anti-thrombotic and anti-inflammatory treatments, gut microbiome support, and personalized rehabilitation.

Dementia and Cognitive Reserve: GOOD NEWS. A recent Lancet study followed 14 factors identified as contributing to Dementia, mentioned in previous columns. This time they added social factors to the analysis and the conclusion suggests that approximately 50% of dementia cases might be preventable. This finding highlights the need to broaden the scope of strategies to prevent dementia to include social determinants such as education, employment, and social relationships. Population level policies that

improve access to education, expand employment opportunities, and promote social engagement might have long-term benefits for cognitive health. To access more information: [https:// www.thelancet.com/journals/lanhl/article/PIIS2666-7568\(25\)00121-7/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanhl/article/PIIS2666-7568(25)00121-7/fulltext)

A new diagnostic tool for early diagnosis of impending Alzheimer's Disease is now available. A blood sample test for the presence of different amyloids gives a highly positive or highly negative result. It is said to be accurate 80% of the time. It can be a valuable tool to begin early interventions to delay or inhibit further development.

Another piece of good news: a study of populations in 27 European countries has identified that speaking a second language can contribute to longevity. A metric was created to compare chronological age with biological age (based on health, lifestyle, and socioeconomic information) to identify a "biobehavioral age gap." Those with higher biological age were called "accelerated agers ". Speaking a second or several languages correlates with higher longevity.

A meta study on delirium followed patients for 12 months after they experienced delirium during a hospital stay. The researchers identified each incident: falls, fractures, pressure injuries, incontinence, infections, sepsis, pneumonia, myocardial infarction, stroke, acute kidney injury, gastrointestinal bleeding, and mortality. These incidents were higher in the delirium group than the control group. The five most common incidents were pneumonia, acute kidney injury, falls, heart failure, and sepsis. Mortality was also higher among those who experienced delirium, indicating the importance of follow-up of patients who show delirium, even if temporary.

Other

Cancer prevention: WHO and its International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) released a report ahead of World Cancer Day, February 4, that 40% of cancer cases worldwide could be prevented. The study looked at 185 countries and thirty-five types of cancer and examined thirty preventable causes, including tobacco, alcohol, high body mass index, physical inactivity, air pollution, ultraviolet radiation – and for the first time – nine cancer-causing infections. Tobacco was seen as the leading preventable cause of cancer, responsible globally for 15% of all new cancer cases, followed by 10% for infections and 3% for alcohol consumption. Dr André Ilbawi, WHO Team Lead for Cancer Control, and author of the study, mentioned that further identification of patterns across countries and population groups will provide governments and individuals with more specific information to help prevent many cancer cases before they start.

News from WHO and PAHO on Staff Health Insurance (SHI): Geneva continues to conduct the evaluation for claims processing and SHI administration for their new digital platform. It will be the key piece for the expected SHI Center of Excellence estimated to be online in early 2027.

PAHO, as everyone knows, is in a serious financial situation. In dealing with this, the Regional Director, Dr. Jarbas Barbosa, made the decision to decentralize and outsource General Services. Since SHI is within this classification, it was initially thought they would be decentralized within the same outsourcing contracts as other services. As we reported last issue, there were some protests and questions in the GOC meeting. What we presently know is PAHO is considering an additional option: third-party administrative management like the one presently held by Cigna for the Americas Region. We are monitoring this situation and will keep you posted as information becomes available.

New Publications: WHO recently published two important guidelines.

WHO consolidated operational handbook on sexually transmitted infections: This handbook equips program managers, policymakers, clinicians, community organizations, and partners with practical guidance that translates WHO's recommendations on STIs into concrete operational approaches.

Essential care package to address mental health and stigma for people with neglected tropical diseases: As a response to growing evidence that people living with non-tropical diseases (NTD) experience higher rates of depression, anxiety, distress and suicidal behaviors than the general population, this publication considers the direct effects of NTDs normally included, and stigma, discrimination and social exclusion. The care package provides governments, health leaders, and frontline services with clear guidance on integrating mental health support and stigma reduction in health systems and existing NTD programs including prevention, identification, assessment, management, and follow-up.

Promoting one's health and longevity: We conclude with a few studies on diet, a topic we ourselves can control to promote our own health and longevity.

A research study recently published in Nature Aging followed more than 2400 older adults over a 15-year period. They examined the effects of several well-known diets: the MIND (Mediterranean DASH Intervention for Neurodegenerative Delay), designed to boost brain health and reduce the risk of dementia; the AHEI (Alternative Healthy Eating Index), based on guidelines for reducing the risk of chronic diseases in general; and the AMED (Alternative Mediterranean Diet), a modified version of the Mediterranean diet adapted to Western eating habits. A commonality of these diets is a focus on vegetables, fruit, whole grains, nuts, legumes, and unsaturated fats. The diets also suggest reduced intake of sweets, red meat, processed meat, butter, and margarine. Following one of these diets was associated with a slower development of brain disorders and heart disease.

Lancet has begun a three staged series of studies on ultra processed foods. UPFs are defined as the most processed food group and contain little to no whole-food ingredients, made instead of food derivatives and additives. Findings verify that this pattern is displacing globally long-established diets centered on whole foods as well as their culinary preparation as dishes and meals. The studies indicate this pattern results in deterioration of diet quality, especially in relation to chronic disease prevention, and increases, by various mechanisms, the risk of multiple diet-related chronic diseases. In conclusion, the elevated consumption of ultra processed foods is considered a key driver escalating the global burden of multiple diet-related chronic diseases. An additional observation that gives us food for thought is that while the pattern of high consumption was originally thought to be mostly limited to teens and young adults. The study noted there is a significant increase in its consumption by the aging population. The study mentioned several probable reasons for this increase including poverty, isolation of some older people, and convenience.

All for now. Remember that you are the person responsible for your health. Prevention as seen in several of the studies, CAN bring results!!

Wishing everyone a happy, healthy, and interesting life until the next Newsletter!

The Joy of Working with Marti

By Ana Maria Paulina

"I had the pleasure of working for Marti as her assistant during my first few years at PAHO; and I can say wholeheartedly that it was a great experience! We faced many challenges over the years at PAHO, both internal and external, but through it all, we persevered.

She was the kind of boss who would make you feel happy to get up in the morning to go to work, to the extent that is possible. Most importantly, she made you feel valuable, respected, and trusted. We would discuss the day/week priorities and then she would let me organize the work accordingly without ever micromanaging!

Her energy was endless; I remember Marti would get up very early in the morning to play tennis before starting her consistently busy workday. In fact, she is still remarkably busy professionally and personally; and I still do not know how she does it!!

Marti and I have kept in touch through the years and remain great friends. Regards.

Dearest Marilyn

By Matilde Maddaleno

Although we haven't seen each other for over 10 years, your presence remains vivid in my mind and memory. We shared unforgettable moments, profound learning experiences, and above all, the conviction that interdisciplinarity not only enriches our work but also strengthens human connections. I fondly remember your smile, your tenderness, your remarkable ability to communicate, and that genuine simplicity that always defined you. You were, and continue to be, a woman deeply committed to your family, your friends, and your community, but also to the countries and people who were always your ultimate goal in promoting health. Thank you for your friendship, your wonderful camaraderie, and for everything about you that remains in those of us who had the privilege of walking alongside you. Warmest regards.

New Year's Message from UN Joint Staff Pension Fund

By Rosemarie McClean and Robert van der Zee

Dear UNJSPF Participants, Retirees and Beneficiaries: As we begin a new year, we want to look back at 2025 and provide an outlook for 2026.

The United Nations Joint Staff Pension Fund (UNJSPF or the "Fund") remains financially strong and steadfast in its mission to ensure pension security to those we serve. Regular actuarial studies confirm that the Fund can meet all its obligations to current and future beneficiaries well into the future.

Preliminary figures show the Fund's assets valued at US\$107.01 billion as at 31 of December. The preliminary nominal rates of return were 11.8% (3-year period) and 6.9% (15-year period). After adjusting for inflation, the corresponding real rates of return were 4.2% (15-year period), with the 15-year return compared to the real return target of 3.5%.

2025 marked our busiest year for benefits processing. Over 95% of benchmarked benefits were successfully processed within 15 business days once all required documents were received from the respective employing organization.

Monthly pension payrolls were issued without fail, and cost-of-living adjustments were applied promptly to protect purchasing power during a period of high inflation. The Digital Certificate of Entitlement app enabled more than 44,000 retirees and beneficiaries (nearly 60% of the eligible population) to submit proof of life digitally, reducing paper use and mailing costs while improving efficiency and security measures.

On 30 December 2025, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) adopted its latest resolution A/RES/80/243 requesting the Pension Board to conduct a holistic review of the UNJSPF pension scheme, as part of the broader UN80 reforms. This review will explore:

- Options for pension scheme designs, such as defined contribution and hybrid schemes
- Adjustments within the existing scheme
- Measures to lower contributions while maintaining the sustainability and respecting accrued pension rights.

The Pension Board is expected to present its report on these options during the General Assembly's eighty-third session in 2028. These discussions do not affect the Fund's ability to pay benefits or its financial stability.

The Fund will focus on the following in 2026:

- Consider the results of the 31 December 2025 actuarial valuation, as part of its regular two-year cycle.
- Prepare for the next Asset Liability Management (ALM) study, a critical exercise to align our investment strategy with our long-term obligations.
- Progress feasibility study for Total Portfolio Approach (TPA) to assess options for improving the Fund's investment model.
- Implement the Fund's 2026 administrative budget of \$168.46 million, approved by the General Assembly, reaffirming its oversight role and commitment to the Fund's long-term sustainability.
- Maintain our strong performance in meeting the evolving needs of our clients while modernizing our systems to further enhance efficiency, resilience and accessibility.

Together with the Fund's 25 member organizations and dedicated UNJSPF staff, we remain committed to serving you. Thank you for your trust and best wishes for 2026.

Rosemarie McClean is the Chief Executive of Pension Administration and Robert van der Zee is the Acting Representative of the Secretary-General for the Investments of the UNJSPF assets.

German Perdomo: Commitment to “Health for All”

By Philippe Lamy

I understand that Germán is "retiring" from his responsibilities in editing the Association's newsletter. Germán has been one of the very few who has dedicated so many years to serving the collective interests of PAHO staff and former staff, in both associations: the active Staff Association and the Retirees' Association. My Washington colleagues can speak to this much better than I ...

Personally, I particularly remember different scenario, at the country level: in Bolivia. Germán, as PAHO/WHO Representative, welcomed me to his team, supported my first assignment, and helped me to initially understand what PAHO was.

These were different times... When there was dialogue with and among all stakeholders. When work was done at both the national and local levels. When the need for intersectoral and interdisciplinary interventions was recognized. When public health was also about action. When primary health care was the cornerstone and foundation for reducing health inequities. When the commitment to “health for all” was a consensus! When PAHO/WHO was recognized, and in turn, it responded and made a difference. When international cooperation built peace and development for all!

Today, more than ever, it is a legacy that our generation must pass on!

Move a Little, Gain a Lot

By Vilma Gawryszewski



It is well established that regular physical activity provides significant physical and mental health benefits, including reduction of all-cause cardiovascular and cancer mortality. Among its benefits for brain health are lowering the risks of developing anxiety, depression, and dementia, including Alzheimer's disease.

If you have ever found it difficult to move away from a sedentary lifestyle or reach your recommended health goals, you are not alone. According to PAHO [1], globally, one in four adults do not meet the recommended levels of physical activity. Recent researchers offer encouraging findings to help people adopt a healthier achievable lifestyle.

The two ways to measure movement. The recommendation from WHO and other public health agencies sounded simple: move for **at least 150 minutes of moderate activity per week** [2].

The 10,000-step count is also widely recommended as a practical daily target for physical activity, being associated with reduction in mortality.

Different people may find one approach easier than the other. Office workers might benefit from step goals that encourage movement throughout the day, while swimmers or cyclists may prefer tracking minutes of activity.

The good news is you don't have to choose. Research from the long-running Women's Health Study, published in JAMA Internal Medicine³ suggests that both approaches — tracking how long you are active **and** counting your steps were strongly linked to longer life and lower risk of heart disease. The best option is simply the one that fits most naturally into your routine.

Time- vs Step-Based Physical Activity Metrics for Health [3]. This study followed more than 14,000 women aged 62 and older who wore activity trackers for a week and were then monitored for nearly a decade.

The main findings were:

- Women who achieved more than 150 minutes of moderate activity per week had a **32% lower risk of death** than the least active participants.
- Those who averaged **more than 7,000 steps per day had a 42% lower risk of death**.
- **Both higher activity time and higher step counts** were linked to fewer heart attacks, strokes, and cardiovascular deaths.
- The benefits were seen regardless of body weight.

In practical terms, women in the most active groups lived longer on average than those in the least active groups.

5000 Steps a Day May Slow Disease Progression in Early Alzheimer's Disease. A study published online in Nature Medicine, November 2025 [4], offered a better understanding of the importance of physical activity for maintaining brain health. The findings suggest that taking just over **5,000 steps per day** could curb progression of Alzheimer's disease (AD) in early stages by slowing the accumulation of tau protein in the brain, a protein strongly tied to memory loss in AD.

The study followed nearly 300 older adults for up to 14 years. All participants were cognitively healthy at the start. Different from previous research, this one is not based on self-reported physical activity. During the study, the participants wore pedometers to track daily steps, underwent annual memory testing, and received brain scans to measure the buildup of proteins associated with Alzheimer's Disease.

Participants were grouped according to their average daily steps: inactive ($\leq 3,000$ steps/day), low activity (3,001–5,000), moderate activity (5,001–7,500), and active ($\geq 7,501$).

The findings may help explain why some older adults at risk for the disease experience faster decline than others and, also suggest an easy intervention.

- Compared with inactive individuals, **cognitive decline was lower by 40%, 54%, and 51%** across increasing physical activity levels.
- **A similar trend was seen in daily functioning.** In comparison to inactivity, functional decline slowed by 34%, 45%, and 51% as activity levels rose.
- **Benefits of exercise appeared to level off at around 7,500 steps per day**, suggesting that moderate amounts of movement may provide substantial advantages.
- **Inactive individuals** showed a significantly faster buildup of tau proteins in the brain along with more rapid declines in cognition and daily functioning.

Importantly, any study has limitations. This research used detailed brain scans and long follow-up, but experts noted that it was an observational and relatively small study, so the results do not prove cause and effect. Besides, other pathophysiological components, as well as genetic and acquired factors, increase the risk of AD's development.

Everyday movement counts and consistency is the key. There is robust evidence that all types of movement contribute to health. If you are older, sedentary, don't exercise, or feel that 10,000 steps a day is overwhelming, remember that it is not necessarily about intense workouts or perfect step counts. It is about expending energy and being consistent. People who live longer tend to be those who keep

moving regularly over many years. The best plan is the one you will keep doing tomorrow... and next month... and next year.

Physical activity does not have to happen in a gym, so move more, sit less, and find activities you enjoy and can stick with. Your body will thank you for it.

Among strategies to overcome barriers and increase daily activity are:

- Take a walk around the block.
- Go for a stroll after dinner.
- Park a little farther away.
- Make it fun: join a walking group, walk your dog, or put on your favorite playlist and dance.

References:

1. Available at PAHO webpage: [Physical Activity - PAHO/WHO | Pan American Health Organization](#)
2. Available at WHO World Health Organization webpage: [Physical activity](#)
3. Available at PubMed: [Time- vs Step-Based Physical Activity Metrics for Health - PubMed](#)
4. Available at Medscape: [5000 Steps a Day May Slow Disease Progression in Early AD](#)

Marti Rice, Always a Colleague, Friend, and a Servant of Public Health

By Alberto Concha-Eastman, President, Colombia Chapter



Our memory sometimes fails us when we want to faithfully pay tribute and offer homage, a sincere and kind remembrance of moments we shared in the demanding work of service that was, is, and will continue to be, the Pan American Health Organization. But that unintentional gap in our memory is more than compensated when the image and smile of that person come clearly to mind. Yes, Marilyn Rice, affectionately known as Marti, easily comes to mind as a friend and colleague in the Area of Sustainable Development. Although we did not have the same responsibilities, she worked in community development, urban health, health promotion, reproductive

health, and, in short, everything enabling people and communities to enjoy health and life, and I in the promotion of coexistence and prevention of violence and injuries, also incorporating the concepts and policies of urban health and sustainable development.



Guto brought us together with other colleagues to emphasize and unite us with greater academic rigor to accurately share responsibility as PAHO field advisors and ensure a common understanding of the Primary Health Care (PHC) Strategy. Marti Rice was a leading figure to promote and uphold her knowledge of health promotion, community communication, and the risks of not implementing and activating these policies. When Sir Michael Marmot, already fully active as WHO Coordinator of the Commission on the Determinants of Health, met with us in his office at Guto's invitation, it was precisely Marti who with her comments, questions, and suggestions, who clearly conveyed the importance to address and promote as PAHO, the ideas Marmot condensed in the document published in 2008. Not

once, but several times in working sessions, we agreed as advisors to support, strengthen, and promote the work we enjoyed.

Marti, standing next to us, radiated confidence, conviction of her opinion, respect for others. I do not exaggerate when I say we all carefully listened to her when she spoke on key issues such as urgently implementing the Determinants of Health in the PHC strategy defined by Alma Ata in 1978. Her opinion was considered essential both for her expertise and understanding of these concepts. Primary Health Care was undoubtedly one of her priorities.



Now, in her retirement, I see her from afar, efficiently managing the PAHO AFSM Newsletter. Truly, great work for approximately 14 years. Truthfully, great work, difficult to replace. Rigorous, friendly, and very thorough delivering each quarter the Newsletter. I believe, without exaggeration, she was the heart and soul of this quarterly publication that brings together former PAHO staff members.

For our great pleasure, Marti wrote four articles about her travels to the four “Stan” countries in Central Asia (Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan), titled " My Journey to the Stans of Central Asia, My Journey on the Silk Road - Part 2, My Journey on the Silk Road – Part 3 Architecture, My Khiva, Uzbekistan Journey on the Silk Road – Part 4: Craftsmanship and Artistry¹.



When one reads Marti's travel notes, you are left with two feelings:

1. You want to ask her to be your guide on a new adventure to the “Stans,” and
2. If that doesn't happen, at least you can say you have second-hand knowledge of those cultures and their history. These are stories written with the mastery of someone who knows how to travel and to share.

Today former PAHO staff members are voluntarily together in AFSM and will always have Marti's figure and voice of encouragement in our quarterly Newsletters, reminding us not to falter and to welcome common interests and ideas.

For friendship, professional respect, and warmth, I send you from Cali, Colombia an affectionate hug, to ensure when you hear GRACIAS, THANK YOU, you will know they are spoken with strength and meaning they sincerely deserve.

¹ Published in the AFSM Newsletters of July, October, December 2023; April 2024

Thanks, German, for your Human Warmth

By Lily Hidalgo

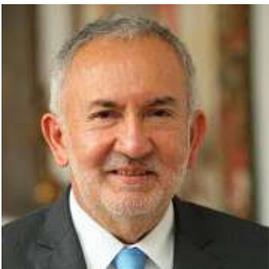
Germán is more than my colleague; he's my brother in arms and triumphs. We met at PAHO many years ago and worked together on planning and evaluation, specifically on the logic framework and the development of AMPES. His professional excellence is self-evident; he always stood out because of his technical and medical knowledge. We traveled extensively together, and what I remember most is his calm and composure in difficult situations. He helped me control myself when my Italian temper flared during heated arguments.



There are many anecdotes; I lost him in Buenos Aires because I could not believe bookstores were open past midnight. He spent his per diem on books, and I spent mine on going to the theater. Above all, I thank Germán for his example of human warmth and his encouragement to question the status quo and face challenges by seeking consensus. As a member of the Association, I thank him for his years of service, and I know we will all miss him now that he is retiring from our AFSM Newsletter.

Lima, a City Sensitive to Older Adults

By Juan Manuel Sotelo



I've been in Lima for a couple of weeks and will stay until the end of February—my intention is to escape the cold winter of DC and enjoy friendships of earlier years.

Every morning, I walk along the boardwalk where I enjoy the sea and many surfers. At around 6:30 a.m. I see about 100 people on the boardwalk, although they are active at all hours, even at night. What is interesting is finding several older adults, either running or power-walking along the boardwalk. The boardwalk has several new developments such as the Chinese Peruvian Park, with spaces for exercise, places to practice Tai Chi, benches for reflection, all amidst beautiful landscaping. There are also a series of sports fields maintained by the Municipality of Miraflores and even three dog parks for pets to play.



My sister-in-law Barbara is very active participating in activities that promote healthy ageing in San Isidro, her municipality. Barbara has a full schedule throughout the week participating in programs

offered by her municipality. Since I live in Miraflores, I studied whether it has a similar commitment promoting healthy ageing as San Isidro, and I found that it does. Miraflores has four centers that work specifically with older adults, two of which are close to my apartment, so right away I decided to visit them and sign up for their activities. Each of these centers has its own program, which is updated at the beginning of each month.



The center offers courses ranging from ballroom dancing to drawing and painting, yoga, Tai Chi, as well as writing, providing legal advice, visits to museums, historical sites, and beaches, among countless other options.

As I learn more about the origins of these activities, I realized this commitment dates to when the Pan American Health Organization supported the Ministry of Health promoting health, developing healthy cities and municipalities, thereby creating conditions for better health.

These long weeks I am spending in Peru, will contribute to my quest for healthy longevity. I am confident this will be the case and these tangible programs I am experiencing in my homeland will be replicated in other countries.

Merciless Hurricane Melissa and Its Impact on the People of Jamaica

By Carol Burgher



On October 28, 2025, extremely powerful devastating Category 5 Hurricane Melissa hit Jamaica; recorded as the strongest hurricane to hit Jamaica. It was fast and furious with ferocious wind gusts of 252 miles per hour, which gave the island an unprecedented lashing.

Hurricane Melissa's Disastrous Landfall: Melissa made landfall in Black River, St. Elizabeth, and other Western parishes. It brought with it widespread flooding and landslides. The island was plunged into darkness and telecommunications were severely affected. Massive trees were uprooted and stripped bare; roads were flooded like rivers and heavy-duty concrete poles broke in pieces like match sticks. Heritage sites, tourist attractions, hospitals, police stations and schools were not spared. The sole distributor of electricity in Jamaica - the Jamaica Public Service (JPS) - reported that the extreme force of winds swept across the island and destroyed several of its high voltage transmission facilities, including their sturdy steel towers. Five major hospitals and most of the health centers were severely damaged. The catastrophic storm surge ripped many of them apart.



Devastating Landfall in the Western Parishes: Black River, founded in 1709, was once a booming town in Jamaica. In 1893 it was the first place in the Caribbean to have electricity. It has a rich history and many outstanding landmarks – one of which is St. John's Parish Church built in 1845 of local limestone. Black River also had many wooden structures; destroyed by Hurricane Melissa's wrath. Also

destroyed was St. John's Parish Church, solid concrete houses, as well as stone structures. Based on a report in the Sunday Gleaner, the storm affected 900,000 people and demolished 156,000 homes. The authorities reported that forty-five people lost their lives as a direct result of the hurricane, a number that does not include those who were injured, are missing and/or unaccounted for. Access to some affected communities was challenging, communication systems were torn apart, and precise information is limited.

National Security Framework: Not even Jamaica's national security framework escaped Hurricane Melissa's wrath. National Security and Peace (JNSP), the oversight agency of the Jamaica Constabulary Force (JCF) reported one hundred and forty (140) police stations sustained damage of varying degrees of the one hundred and sixty-six (166) assessed Police Stations islandwide. Considering the level of threat this situation could cause for the safety of the nation; the government embarked on a program of rapid restoration of these facilities.

Those parts of the island that were not severely damaged by the hurricane have recovered quickly and are giving assistance to displaced people. Although Hurricane Melissa did not make landfall in other parishes, it has created an environment of mutual trust and care as mentioned by both Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr and Lady Bird Johnson. In one of his sermons, Dr. King, Jr spoke about "an inescapable network of mutuality where everything is tied together" and Lady Bird said that this "environment is where we all have a mutual interest; it is the one thing all of us share."



Outpouring of Support: Immediately after the hurricane, Jamaica began to receive support from our diaspora, local and foreign celebrities, churches, individuals, various charities, national communities, and international organizations including the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO). In its November 2025 Situation Report for Jamaica, PAHO reported that it collaborated with the government, through the Ministry of Health and Wellness, in many critical areas related to health. It also provided over thirteen tons of essential medical supplies and assisted with the transportation of a refrigerated container to support storing pharmaceuticals at a health facility without power.

Demolition of Jamaica's "Breadbasket": The Western Region is known as the 'breadbasket' of Jamaica because it usually produces an abundance of agricultural produce. Considering that crops were destroyed and cattle and other livestock perished on a large scale, it has resulted in a shortage of local foodstuff throughout the island. Not only are local foodstuffs in short supply, but the prices have skyrocketed because of their scarcity. Hurricane Melissa was so destructive that it will be several months before local food supply recover from its effect.

The Dilemma: The government is placing tremendous emphasis on recovery while also facing the dilemma to provide housing to meet the needs of displaced people and strengthen and reshape the region to withstand future climatic disasters. The influx of volunteers immediately after the disaster was overwhelming while also carefully reviewing and coordinating relief efforts.

Effect of Global Temperatures: The JPS stated that their building standards were made to withstand a category three hurricane which is what we have previously sustained. However, Professor Michael Taylor, a climate scientist at the University of the West Indies, indicates the conditions that gave rise to Melissa will continue at the beginning of the next hurricane season. The reality then, is that there could be a recurrence of hurricane Melissa. The warm ocean waters which affect global temperatures may increase the likelihood of extreme events such as was experienced in October 2025.

Social and Psychological Impact: January 11, 2026, Sunday Gleaner carried a story about the psychological impact of hurricane Melissa. It reported that one resident from the affected area admitted

he continues to have nightmares about shoveling water from his home during the storm. A mother reported her 27-year son disappeared while attempting to cross a flooded waterway. She lamented she could not be at peace and was clinging to the fragile hope the body of her son might be found. In the same story Dr. Leachim Semaj, well-known psychologist, remarked “although the storm has passed, its impact remains deeply embedded in the nervous system of many Jamaicans.

What is in a name? Hurricane Melissa was merciless. The name “Melissa” has become very unpopular in Jamaica now; it is a powerful reminder of the disaster it caused. The feeling among Jamaicans is this name should never again be used as a tropical storm or hurricane.

Lessons Learned by a Caregiver

By Maria Teresa Cerqueira



A caregiver is a person who cares for another person, especially a loved one who cannot take care of themselves due to disability, mobility, or other challenges. I have been caring for my son for over twenty years since a road injury caused a traumatic brain injury; since then, he uses a wheelchair and has issues recalling recent occurrences. In this article I will share my experiences and lessons learned as his caregiver. Everyone who cares for another person needs time to relax and strengthen reflection and caretaking skills. It has helped me to keep a journal to think of the loved one’s condition and improve our dialogue. It is important to have confidence in oneself; to know we are contributing to their wellbeing and to keep our communication open.

As his caregiver, I assist him to meet his daily needs. Responsibilities range from bathing, dressing, feeding, transporting, grocery shopping, housework, managing incontinence, assisting with mobility, preparing meals, dispensing medicines, and communicating with medical staff. Caregivers can but are not responsible or obligated to be advocates. I have been both for my son, but that is a topic for another article. In the last twenty years with my support my son has improved tremendously, from not being able to hold a spoon or fork at meals to walking within parallel bars, taking showers, and dressing himself. In his power chair, he now goes to the park with me and around the neighborhood feeding the ducks and peacocks, while I walk to keep healthy. He knows many neighbors and they often come out to greet him and cheer him on!

How I learned to be a caregiver: Early on I took a class to learn the skills needed to care for my son, and to cope with the demands of this commitment. All caretakers should try to gain the competencies needed for the care of their loved one. I found a remarkable community education program called “Endependence” which provided critical skills for being a caregiver. While he was in the hospital doing physical therapy, I learned how to assist him to transfer to the wheelchair and to prevent injury to either of us. This was a challenge and I needed to maintain and strengthen my health to continue this work and to not become irked or upset when things did not go as planned. Often, it is said that when things are difficult our character is strengthened; this helps me to maintain a strong healthy relationship with my beloved son and keeps me resilient to care for him day in and day out.

How I managed to maintain my physical and emotional health: I learned to identify my signs of stress, feeling burdened, worrying, and getting tired. Taking a walk helps me. Doing my exercises - swimming was especially important and sleeping enough, usually 8 or 9 hours! For me, it was very important not to lose interest in activities and hobbies that I enjoy. I make every day have meaning. Painting was always an activity I loved, and so now, I take time to paint and especially paint with friends and my grandchildren. Volunteering is a blessing; I volunteer 3-4 hours a week when I can, and when

I have someone to care for my son. I learned to crochet with my grandmother, now it is an activity I do to relax, and making blankets for my grandchildren has been a joy.

When I feel overburdened or feel that I cannot deal with some of the activities that my son loves to do, I ask for help. It is important for the caretaker to identify when we need help and not feel that we can do it all. We must take care of ourselves in order to take care of our loved ones. It is important to let them do as many activities as possible and to join the person in those activities if we can.

What was most difficult to deal with was feeling sad and wondering what a strong productive young man he could have been. But staying positive and helping him be as independent as he can be and seeing how much he now does despite the disability is encouraging. I enjoy listening to his conversations, even when it is repetitive. Listening is important in caregiving. My son loves to read; I encourage him and get him books he selects. He chooses his clothes and most of his meals. It is important to encourage the person we care for to make as many decisions as they can. My experience caring for my son with physical and mental disabilities, who finds it challenging to remember and understand, and is at times confused and asks the same questions, nevertheless, I encourage him to decide. This is quite different from the challenges of someone caring for a person with dementia, which is a topic for a future article.

How I used community resources and where to look for them: Caregivers can be mothers, fathers, spouses, partners, adult children, parents, other relatives (siblings, aunts, nieces/nephews, in-laws, grandchildren), friends, and neighbors. Regardless of the relationship with the person being cared for, it is important to add the title caregiver to the list of things you are. Identifying yourself as a caregiver is important in your search for resources to help you navigate this role. There are many resources online of community organizations that care for disabled persons. There are many day care opportunities with activities which in turn give us as caregivers a break. Volunteering has been an important way to keep up my strength and enjoy the company of retired friends.

- On Being a Caregiver: <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/caregiving/being-a-caregiver>
- Caregiving 101: <https://www.caregiver.org/resource/caregiving-101-being-caregiver/>
- Healthy Habits: Caring for Yourself when Caring for Another: <https://www.cdc.gov/caregiving/caring-for-yourself/index.html>
- Top Caregiver Tips for Maintaining Health and Well-Being: <https://www.heart.org/en/health-topics/caregiver-support/tips-for-staying-healthy-and-active>

Ode to German

By Marilyn Rice

Working with German over the last ten years has been an amazing experience. In terms of the newsletter, he was efficient in editing all the Spanish articles and when I sent him the final English articles to format, his eagle eye always found mistakes and corrections that needed to be made. He put me to shame. I thought everything was correct and finalized and he inevitably found things that I had missed. In formatting each newsletter, he was creative in getting things to fit properly and in finding appropriate photographs to put on the front page. Equally importantly, he was a guiding light for me, always there for me to consult on the appropriateness and acceptance of articles about which I had doubts. As President of PAHO AFSM, he provided gentle, effective, and insightful leadership, setting an example for subsequent presidents to follow. His guidance, leadership, and insights will be sorely missed.

Testimony of an Exemplary Blood Donor

By José Ramiro Cruz and Jennie Vasquez-Solís



... 52 years donating blood. More than 100 donations. 53 liters or 14 gallons of his blood circulate through the veins of people he doesn't know. Happy to have lent a hand.

Edgar Barrientos began donating blood in 1973 in the Washington, D.C. area, just two years after starting his career at the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO). It wasn't a planned decision; it was a direct invitation.

His boss in Finance, Jack Anderson, was a regular Red Cross donor. One day, on the way to a blood drive, he asked Edgar if he would like to do the same. Edgar had donated once in Guatemala, his native country, but had never done so regularly. **"No one in need had ever asked me,"** he recalled. That simple gesture changed the course of his life.

After the required tests and medical interview, he received confirmation: he was eligible to donate. When he did, he experienced something he still finds difficult to describe. "I felt like I was doing something special, something that didn't cost me anything, but that could save lives." He thought about hospitalized patients, surgeries, emergencies, accidents, children who depend on a transfusion. He understood that his blood could make the difference between life and death.

He never stopped doing it. Eventually, the Red Cross awarded him his first pin for donating a gallon of blood. He received it with pride. Decades later, at 82 years of age, he had reached almost 14 gallons, or 53 liters, and 100 voluntary donations. For half a century, he has repeated the same silent gesture: extending his arm. His primary motivation hasn't changed. "My biggest motivation is feeling like I am giving life to people I don't know." It is a deep conviction, reinforced by concrete signs. After each donation, he receives a thank-you email. Days later, another message informs him that his blood was sent to a hospital in Maryland, Washington, D.C., or Virginia. That confirmation reminds him that his contribution is not just an abstraction: it reaches a real patient at a critical moment.



His blood type, O positive, is especially valuable. It can be transfused to patients with A, B, or AB positive blood types, making it a frequent resource in medical emergencies. He knows this but avoids any hint of self-importance. He prefers to emphasize a statistic that troubles him: although 66% of the population in the United States is eligible to donate, only 2% does. This gap motivates him to remain steadfast.

Over the years, he has received formal recognition. When he reached 100 donations, a journalist from Channel 7 interviewed him while he was on the extraction table. The story was broadcast on the evening news. "It was a unique experience," he admits, proud of the joy it brought to his family.

However, the scenes that move him most did not happen in front of cameras. Once, in Chicago, he was wearing a T-shirt identifying him as a blood donor. Two people approached him. One of them said, "Thanks to you, my son is alive. He may not have received your blood, but if there weren't people like you, my son would not be alive." That brief, anonymous encounter reaffirmed the meaning of five decades of dedication.

For Edgar, donating blood isn't just an outward act; it is also a personal discipline. Before each donation, he must answer questions about his health and avoid risky behaviors. His blood pressure is taken, and his hemoglobin and iron levels are checked. The process forces him to take care of himself. "To be able to donate, I have to be healthy," he says. He has learned to maintain a proper diet, rich in iron. He regularly eats black beans and limits his red meat consumption. His commitment to others translates into responsibility for himself.

But his generosity does not begin or end in a Red Cross room.

Born in Guatemala to a family of limited means, he was able to graduate as an accounting expert thanks to the help of many people. Later, he emigrated to the United States in search of opportunities. A job offer from PAHO paved the way for his professional and personal development. "That opened the path to who I am today," he says. Since then, he feels he must give back.

That gratitude is also expressed through other gestures. Together with his wife, he prepares five pounds of black beans weekly for a shelter in Alexandria. Feeding those in need and donating blood stems from the same conviction: **life is a gift that multiplies when shared.**

The donation process, he explains, is simple and efficient. He receives reminders when he is eligible to donate again. He schedules an appointment at his convenience, completes the online form the day before, and in less than an hour, it is over. Then he rests, hydrates, and the next day a thank-you message arrives. An orderly, almost routine cycle he has repeated for 52 years.

However, behind that routine lies a frequently renewed decision: a conscious choice of solidarity.

Edgar does not know the names or faces of those who have received his blood. He does not need to know. It is enough for him to know that, in some hospitals, someone had a second chance. That in an emergency room, a transfusion arrived just in time. That child was able to go home.

In a world where extraordinary is often associated with grandiose gestures, his story proves the opposite. Perseverance, repeated over decades, can become a silent form of heroism.

Fifty-two years after that first invitation, he continues to extend his arm. And with it, the possibility that someone may continue to breathe.

In Memoriam: Mrs. Lilieth Christian

By Carol Burgher, Focal Point, Jamaica



It is with sadness that I report the passing of Mrs. Lilieth Christian, a PAHO CFNI retiree. She was the Accounting Technician at the Caribbean Food and Nutrition Institute (CFNI) for thirteen years, a former PAHO Center. She was multi-talented and played a pivotal role in salary surveys and related matters. Mrs. Christian leaves her husband Dr. Ken Christian, three children, grandchildren and other relatives and friends. May her soul rest in peace.

Where Am I Now?

By Martiza Romero



This story comes simply from my own authentic voice. Far from aspiring to perfection or literary merit, it merely aims to recount this chapter of my life, filled with movement, family, travel, community, dancing, tango, mountains, and silence.

So, as we say in Málaga... let's get down to business.

When people ask me, "Where are you now?" I smile because the answer depends on the time of year, the day ... and even the time zone.

Upon retiring, I first returned to my beloved Dominican Republic, and shortly after, Spain became my home base. Before settling in completely, I made an unexpected stop: I spent time in Berkeley improving my English. It was my way of saying to life: I still want to keep learning. Since then, my map has ceased to be static; it has become itinerant. Sometimes I am in Germany, enjoying time with my eldest daughter, Sara, with Arno—my son, whom Germany gave me—and with my grandsons, Luca and Leo, who teach me every day how to see the world with fresh eyes. Other times I am in Barcelona, spending time with Amalia, my youngest, and Víctor, my son Colombia gave me.



And when I can, I return to the Dominican Republic, to my large family—maternal and paternal—to nourish and be nourished by hugs and stories, as well as reconnecting with lifelong friends. Or with PAHO colleagues, and to that part of me that still smells of the Caribbean.

As you can see, I'm mostly "traveling the world" most of the time.



Interestingly, retirement changed the hectic pace of project deadlines, plans, and programs. Urgent emails and 8:30 meetings disappeared; now I have a different kind of agenda: invitations, walks, classes, get-togethers. Activities that wink at me and say: come join us.

So sometimes I resort to the old planning tools I learned at PAHO to decide what to do first... because I want to do everything (and my Gemini side always gets me into more adventures than planned 😊). There are days when I'm hiking in the mountains with the "Sunday Hikes" hiking group. Others include the Santiago Camino.... And many end up on a dance floor dancing tango in Malaga, in a roundabout in Argentina, or even among the mountains.

The gym travels with me. Wherever I am, I try to move my body. It's my way of thanking it and taking care of it for everything it allows me to do. I also seek out opportunities for silence, yoga, and meditation. Movement and pauses. Action and calm.

I also participate in community initiatives such as the Malaga Urban Forest (BUM) because I still believe that wellbeing is built by everyone.

Over time, I understood something beautiful: that PAHO lives on in me. I still think of health as an everyday act. I still care, listen, and support. Now I do it from different perspectives: my family, my community, senior citizens' associations, and small daily gestures. The same vocation... with a different rhythm.

So, if you ask me again: Where am I now?

I'm traveling, dancing, walking, hugging. Learning to balance plans and pauses. Living a retirement full of the world, family, joy, and movement. Living in the here and now, wherever I am... and, for now, happily in Málaga.

And to express it succinctly, the collage “Malagueños of the World”, presented by the Málaga Photographic Society (SFM), reflects, in part, the answer to the question: Where am I now?



Nace en San Francisco de Macorís (provincia del Cibao, Dominicana). Ciudadana del mundo, vive desde hace años fuera de su país, cultivando la presencia y el disfrute del aquí y ahora. Medita y salubritis, formada en Promoción Estratégica de la Salud. Hoy jubilada, continúa ejerciendo su vocación desde la vida cotidiana: cuidar, escuchar y aprender.

Proveniente de una familia guatemalteca, se inspira, sueña y abraza a los dos países melizos que iluminan su vida.

En Málaga encontró un equilibrio entre movimiento y calma —tango, merengue, cumbia y meditación—, amada por Andalucía y las oportunidades para una vida activa y compartida.

Maritza
REPÚBLICA DOMINICANA

Thank You German Perdomo

By **Mónica Stenning**

Are there people who come into your life and leave a memory that, years later, comes back to you, making you smile and wonder, "What became of them?"



We worked together in the Department of Analysis and Planning (DAP) team many years ago (maybe 20), and when I think of him, I do so fondly for his simplicity, kindness, and above all, his empathy for others. It did not matter what was going on, he always had time to listen and offer advice, be it personal or professional.

I remember one time we met at the copier, and I said, "Se atracó el papel"—the paper got 'stuck' though in English 'atracó' means to dock—to which he replied "Monica, ships dock, papers get jammed." I never had a paper jam again!

Thank you, Dr. Perdomo.

CHANGES IN CONTACT INFORMATION?

Let us know! It is important for us to keep in touch. If you moved or changed your email address, phone number, please send the new information to our Membership Chair Karen Gladbach at gladbach.afsm@gmail.com



Officers

Hernán Rosenberg, President
Hugo Prado, Vice President
Juan Manuel Sotelo, Secretary
Sylvia Schultz, Treasurer
Karen Gladback, Membership
Chair

Members of the Board

Rolando Chacón, Carol Collado,
Karen Gladbach, Hugo Prado,
Marilyn Rice, Hernán
Rosenberg, Sylvia Schultz, Juan
Manuel Sotelo, Gina Watson

Volunteers

Jeannette Bolaños, Antonio
Hernández, Gloria Morales,
Martha Peláez

Communications Committee

Coordinator - Marilyn Rice
Members - Rolando Chacón,
Gloria Coe, Carol Collado,
Antonio Hernández, Patricia
Ilijic, Violeta Mata García, Sonia
Mey Schmidt, Martha Peláez,
Hernan Rosenberg, Juan
Manuel Sotelo

President Colombian Chapter

Alberto Concha Eastman

Webmaster

Violeta Mata García

Focal Points

Mirta Roses Periago -
Argentina
Karen Sealey - Barbados
Lucimar Coser - Brazil, Brasilia
César Vieira - Brazil, Río de
Janeiro
Antonio Campino - Brazil, São
Paulo
Rodrigo Pascal – Chile
Edgar Serma - Colombia
Carlos Rosales - Costa Rica
Catherine Cocco – Dominican
Republic
Karen Sealy - Eastern
Caribbean
Miguel Malo - Ecuador

Outreach Committee

Coordinator - Philippe Lamy
Members - Antonio Campino y
Alberto Concha Eastman

Health Insurance and Pension Committee

Coordinator - Carol Collado
Members - Nancy Berinstein,
Carol Burger, Rolando Chacón,
Jerry Hanson, Violeta Mata,
Gloria Morales, Haydée
Olcese, Garry Presthus, María
Mercedes Rodríguez, Juan
Manuel Sotelo, Pilar Vidal, José
Luis Zeballos

Auditor

Fredy Burgos

Philippe Lamy - Europa
Hilda Lea - Guatemala
Mena Carto - Guyana
Carol Burgher - Jamaica
Eutimio Luarca - México
Violeta Mata García - México
Jeannette Bolaños - Nicaragua
Haidée Olcese - Perú
Elva López Nieto - Panamá
María Teresa Cerqueira - USA
Terrence Thompson - USA

For more information:

afsmpaho@gmail.com

www.afsmpaho.com

Healthy Ageing Committee

Coordinator -Martha Peláez
Members - María Edith Baca,
María Teresa Cerqueira, Gloria
Coe, Violeta Mata García,
Yvette Holder, Marilyn Rice,
Hernán Rosenberg, Juan
Manuel Sotelo

Newsletter Editorial and Formatting Committee

Guest Editor-in-Chief - Gloria
Coe
**Editor in Spanish and
Translator** - Matilde Pinto
English Translator – Marilyn
Rice
Editor in English - Carol
Burgher