

Connection to Community is Crucial for a Fulfilling Career

2023 CAFP FAMILY MEDICINE PHYSICIAN OF THE YEAR, DR. PAMELA VALENZA

Dr. Pamela Valenza, MD, MPH, is the Chief Health Officer at Tepeyac Community Health Center in Denver and this year's CAFP Family Medicine Physician of the Year. She is recognized for her leadership, community engagement, and compassionate care of patients.

Since joining Tepeyac Community Health Center in 2018, Dr. Pamela Valenza has had a transformational impact on the organization. Under her clinical and leadership guidance, the organization has continued to expand and grow with respect to services, quality, and access for Tepeyac patients and their families to include Medication Assisted Therapy (MAT) services, expanded pediatric and prenatal services, services for the IDD (Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities) and physical disability community, integrated and traditional dental services, gender-affirming hormone therapy, integrated pharmacy services, and more. Over the past five years, Dr. Valenza led efforts for Tepeyac to achieve PCMH recognition, implement a 340b pharmacy program, become an adolescent champion clinic, and she has been a core and integral member of the design team for Tepeyac's 48th and Vine Street 24,500 sq. foot clinic expansion project which opened in February 2023. She was involved from the beginning drafting clinic design plans with architects and working with contractors and developers on interior design, equipment, and buildout to ensure that future patients of Tepeyac have a beautiful space to call their medical home that meets today's standards of excellence through a cultural humility lens.

At the start of the pandemic, Dr. Valenza mobilized quickly to develop and lead Tepeyac's COVID-19 response plan. Dr. Valenza became a trusted voice for Tepeyac patients, staff, and the broader community, sharing information in media appearances and local events to increase awareness about the pandemic and impact on the Denver Latino community and to increase understanding about the virus and, when the time came, its vaccines, including speaking on a Colorado Public Radio Colorado Matters segment and sitting on a panel discussing Kids and the COVID vaccine hosted by The Colorado Sun.

Dr. Valenza led clinical team efforts to achieve HRSA recognition as a Health Center Quality Leader with overall clinic quality performance in the top 20% of health centers nationwide. In 2020, Tepeyac achieved national recognition as a CDC Million Hearts Champion for achieving blood pressure control in 80% of clinic patients with a hypertension diagnosis, which led to an invitation for Dr. Valenza to speak on a national HRSA panel focused on women's cardiovascular needs. Tepeyac was awarded the 2021 Cesar E. Chavez Peace and Justice Committee of Denver's Organization Leadership Award for health equity work within the Latino community, in no small part because of Dr. Valenza's contributions.

In a recent conversation with CAFP, Dr. Valenza spoke further about her role at Tepeyac, her passion for community engagement, and the role that doctors can play when it comes to the scale of their advocacy work for health equity. Dr. Valenza shared her first introduction to Tepeyac was at Adelante, their annual 5k, in 2017, and she was immediately struck by the sense of community, ancestral connection,



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and friendliness of everyone she encountered. She enjoys connecting with other resources and organizations in the community and extending herself beyond the clinic, which has been invaluable as her clinic becomes recognized as a leader in the community. She further shared that doctors have a choice when it comes to the scale of their advocacy work. They can advocate at a patient, community, or population level. Dr. Valenza noted, there is responsibility in privilege and "as a provider, there is an element of privilege that you can use in positive, innovative, and creative ways."

As a former associate program director of a family medicine residency program, Dr. Valenza is passionate about teaching and she started regular student rotations when she joined the clinic in 2018. "My goal is to bring students into the community here and they will continue that interest serving similar communities wherever they go in their careers," she shares. Tepeyac encourages its students to really understand the barriers to care for underserved populations and learn about the resources available to our patients in order to understand their own impact beyond just the day-to-day clinic work.

Dr. Valenza attended undergrad and medical school at Temple University in Philadelphia, near where she was born and raised. As a MedScholar, she was encouraged to pursue courses of study in undergrad outside of the traditional pre-med track, an experience she credits for the unique lens with which she approaches medicine today. In a year between undergrad and medical school, she spent the year working for AmeriCorps at a charter school in North Philadelphia. Her role helping students in a myriad of ways as a pre-college program coordinator solidified her dedication to community work. "I knew I wanted to work in a community and serve a community," she says. She credits an early mentor in medical school, a family physician, who helped affirm that physicians can maintain individuality in a sea of conformity and helped pave the way for understanding the breadth and scope of what can make an excellent physician. Dr. Valenza completed her family medicine residency at the University of Colorado Denver Health Track in Denver, and was exposed to many different patient populations and integrated care models, which allowed many different avenues of growth for her professional interests.

When asked about how she handles the stress of her profession, Dr. Valenza says it's important to be intentional about understanding her own humanity, being present and practicing gratitude, setting boundaries by protecting time off and also being realistic with what can be done during the work day, and appreciating the satisfaction and joy that comes from interactions with her patients. Her personal mantra strikes a poignant tone: "I'm going to get done what I can get done, in the time that I have, and that's going to be good enough." She also practices yoga, travels, enjoys time outdoors, and spending time with family and friends, especially those in medicine who can share an empathetic ear to the challenges and frustrations that accompany working in medicine today.

CAFP is honored to name Dr. Valenza the 2023 Family Physician of the Year.