

Director of Touro's physician studies moves on

By Sarah Rohrs

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A top Touro University administrator, who propelled the physician assistant studies program into a success story, has resigned to take a position with The California Endowment.

Lauren Padilla-Valverde was the director of Touro's physician studies programs, which resulted in numerous local initiatives through Fighting Back Partnership and local schools to help people embrace healthy life-styles and encourage healthy communities.

Her last day was Friday.

The Physician Studies Program is part of Touro's Joint Master of Science in Physician Assistant Studies/Master of Ppublic Health Program (MSPAS/MPH).

A health sciences program that also grants students master's degrees in public health, its mission is to train clinicians as both physician assistants and public health professionals. A primary focus is to increase the number of graduates for low-income areas where there is a shortage of health professionals, Touro spokesman Jesus Mena said.

Touro University Provost Michael Harter said Padilla-Valverde's resignation is a major loss to the school.

Padilla-Valverde said she leaves with a heavy heart and mixed feelings.

In 2003, she took charge of the program when there were insufficient teachers, training sites and not enough space for instruction, according to Touro. She initiated a five-year strategic plan to build it up and address the needs of the under-served.

"What we have tried to impart in our students is that the health of an individual

is undeniably linked to the health of their community," she said. Such issues as diet, exercise, violence, drugs and other issues must be considered in instilling healthy lifestyles, she said.

The number of graduates passing the medical board exam on their first try rose from 67 percent to 100 percent, and revenues from the program have increased 20 percent. Most importantly to Padilla-Valverde, nearly half of all graduates work in California's medically under-served communities.

At The California Endowment, Padilla-Valverde will be part of a 10-year statewide initiative called Building Healthy Communities and Healthy California.

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