

Ten Questions With....

Ismael Cordero



Ismael Cordero is a senior project officer at the ECRI Institute. He has led training and consultative activities for biomedical engineers and technicians, clinical personnel, and hospital administrators in more than 50 countries, often in coordination with the American College of Clinical Engineering (ACCE) and the World Health Organization. Cordero is the recipient of the 2008 ACCE Professional Achievement in Management Award and the 2014 AAMI Foundation and ACCE Robert L. Morris Humanitarian Award.

How did you first get into the field of biomedical engineering?

When I was in high school, I didn't know what I wanted to pursue as a career. Philosophy interested me, but my parents pushed me toward biomedical engineering as something more "useful and practical." It sounded impressive. I'm very appreciative that my parents pushed me in that direction and that I went along with it, though I never stopped liking philosophy.

Tell us about your humanitarian work, and what inspired you to get involved.

After several years working in U.S. hospitals as a biomedical engineer, I ran across a job ad for a biomedical engineering position aboard a "flying-eye hospital," which travels around the world. I got the job and instantly went from working in the basement of a hospital to the basement of an airplane! That was the beginning of a very exciting and rewarding career helping biomedical engineering colleagues around the world. I enjoyed training people who were thirsty to learn. Their resourcefulness, ingenuity, and patience provided me with many lessons that people in rich countries could also learn.

What are some ways that health-care technology can help in the developing world?

Healthcare technology should be designed for the environment where it will be used. Unfortunately, most of the technologies sold or donated to lower-income countries are inappropriate due to their design, as well as inadequate local support for training, maintenance, and consumables.

Tell us about the new job you began this year at the ECRI Institute.

I toured ECRI Institute when I was in college and thought, "I want to work here." Thirty years later, I'm finally here! It's

certainly different from my past international humanitarian work. As a senior project officer, I'm more deeply exercising the scientific and analytical areas of my brain.

You previously oversaw the training of biomedical engineers. What are some of the challenges?

Inspiring biomedical engineers and technicians to stay in their home countries, so that they can continue to help improve those healthcare systems.

Can you provide insight into how you overcame those challenges?

I don't think I ever succeeded in convincing talented engineers and technicians to not to pursue career ambitions in other countries. The reality is that in many places, biomedical engineers are not valued, given the support they need, or properly compensated. It's difficult for them to pass up promising opportunities abroad.

What does the world need more of? Cooperation.

Less of?

Cultural and intellectual borders.

What kind of music do you enjoy?

Before music streaming services existed, I owned over 1,000 CDs. I constantly needed more! Music subscription services have answered that crazy need of mine. If I had to choose? Experimental electronic music. Not something you'd find on the radio.

What is your most important guiding value?

Question everything—including the need to question things.