Medicine’s Culture Brokers: Miami and the Challenge of Diversity in Health Care

Catherine Mas, PhD, Florida International University

After the 1959 Cuban Revolution, hundreds of thousands of Cuban refugees came to Miami. With this influx, the city’s health care system was overwhelmed, not just by the number of patients but also by the differences in culture. Mainstream medicine was often inaccessible or inadequate to Miami’s growing community of Latin American and Caribbean immigrants. Instead, many sought care from alternative, often unlicensed, health practitioners. This Dialogue addresses the history of how an exceptionally diverse medical scene would catch the attention of medical social scientists at the University of Miami School of Medicine, who established Miami’s multiethnic population as a laboratory for cross-cultural care and, indeed, global health.

Dr. Mas is an assistant professor of history at Florida International University. Her recently published book, Culture in the Clinic: Miami and the Making of Modern Medicine (UNC Press, 2022), examines Miami as a locus for global thinking and cross-cultural care in the late twentieth century. Her research was supported by the Goizueta Foundation, which enabled her to conduct extensive archival research at the University of Miami’s Cuban Heritage Collection and many of the university’s other special collections.