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Alfonso Torres receives two awards for public health contributions



For more than 35 years, Dr. Alfonso Torres has been a teacher and mentor, an investigator and pioneer, and a staunch public servant. He is a compassionate, inspiring, and talented leader who has dedicated his career to understanding, controlling, and combating infectious diseases.

Torres's contributions to veterinary medicine were recognized recently with two awards: the Karl F. Meyer-James H. Steele Gold Head Cane Award presented by the Veterinary Epidemiological Society and the APHIS Administrator Award.

"Dr. Torres' contributions have been at the forefront of progress in public health," said Dr. Michael Kotlikoff, Austin O. Hooey Dean of Veterinary Medicine at Cornell University. "His efforts, vision, energy and counsel are of great value to Cornell and the global community."

The Gold Head Cane Award pays tribute to a British custom compelling physicians making house calls to announce their presence and ward off evil spirits with a hollow cane filled with aromatic herbs. Willed to successors, the cane has become a symbol of the profession.

In accepting the award from APHIS, Torres said, "My years of service with APHIS have had a deep impact on my life and have provided great satisfaction. Becoming a public servant and representing the veterinary profession of my adoptive country will always be one of the highlights of my life."

From Colombia, Torres is currently the associate dean of public policy at Cornell's College of Veterinary Medicine. He served as the deputy administrator for veterinary services at the USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service and as the United States Chief Veterinary Officer and US Delegate to the World Organization for Animal Health.

In addition to his teaching at Cornell, he has been instrumental in the USDA-funded training of veterinary students through the Smith-Kilborne Foreign Animal Disease program. This joint Cornell-USDA program delivers the only academic activity that includes one veterinary student from all 28 US colleges plus 1 or 2 Canadian schools every year. He also provides training to foreign veterinarians through the International Transboundary Animal Diseases Courses held at the

Plum Island Animal Disease Center, the largest animal research biocontainment center in the nation, a center that Torres directed for many years.

In addition, Torres was instrumental in establishing a partnership between Cornell and the City University of Hong Kong, and in exploring other potential educational opportunities in China and in India. He also manages the College's biosafety and infectious disease programs, and is a member of the University's biosafety level 3 oversight committee.