

Specialization in Health Systems Management at UTP: Three Decades Shaping the Future of Healthcare in Colombia

Alberth Cristian Herrera ^a

a. Public Health Operations Director. Faculty Member, School of Health Sciences. Universidad Tecnológica de Pereira. Colombia. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3521-5282>

[DOI: 10.22517/25395203.25899](https://doi.org/10.22517/25395203.25899)

In the early 1990s, Colombia was undergoing an unprecedented transformation of its healthcare system. It was in that crucial year of 1995, in the wake of Law 100 of 1993, that the country embarked on a profound restructuring of its healthcare model. As it shifted from a national system to an emerging insurance-based model, new actors, rules, and responsibilities arose—requiring more than regulations alone: they demanded critical thinking, adaptability, and leadership.

It was in this challenging yet fertile context that a group of academics, deeply committed to public health, dared to dream and envisioned an urgent need: to train leaders capable of understanding and transforming this emerging system.

Thus, in July 1995, the *Specialization in Health Systems Management* at the Universidad Tecnológica de Pereira was created, with the firm conviction that it was imperative to prepare human talent capable of navigating and leading these new challenges. Under the leadership of **Dr. Héctor Arteaga Pacheco**, and with the invaluable support of key figures such as **Dr. Armando Arciniegas Rincón (†)** and **Dr. Sary Arango Gaviria (†)**, together with a dedicated group of professors and staff from the Municipal Health Institute, a bold vision was forged: not only to train managers for hospitals or health institutions, but to shape leaders capable of interpreting complexities, navigating uncertainty, and acting with ethical responsibility and social commitment to transform this vital and complex system.

Over the past three decades, the program has built an exemplary trajectory, consolidating a training model that combines systemic vision, critical thinking, and a deep commitment to transforming the healthcare system. Its impact has been tangible in **Risaralda** and across the **Coffee Region**. What

began as a bold initiative to professionalize health administration in the Coffee Region has become a regional academic benchmark, with measurable impact in Risaralda and throughout Colombia. As part of this evolution, the program also gave rise to the *Master's Degree in Health Systems Management*, expanding its academic influence and deepening advanced training in healthcare management, planning, and leadership.

More than **240 specialists** and five cohorts of master's graduates have emerged from this collective endeavor. Today, they lead processes in healthcare provider institutions, hospitals, health insurance entities (EPS), local governments, and ministries. Yet, beyond the positions they hold, their true value lies in their capacity to transform realities. It is also an honor to announce that, this very year, our *Master's Degree in Health Systems Management* has been granted renewal of its qualified registration for another seven years—a resounding demonstration of the program's relevance, timeliness, and crucial importance for the healthcare sector in our region.

At a time when the General System of Social Security in Health is experiencing structural tensions, fragmentation, underfunding, institutional crises, and lack of governance, among other challenges, the training of health system managers has become an imperative. Such training requires a systemic perspective, one capable of integrating technology, equity, and sustainability, without losing sight of the human dimension of care. As an academic community, we embrace the commitment to continue adapting to the transformations of our environment—strengthening applied research, incorporating artificial intelligence into decision-making, and preparing leaders capable of managing crises without abandoning hope.

This celebration is not merely another anniversary: it is an invitation to continue building a model of health management education that honors its past, embraces the challenges of the present, and dares to imagine fairer and healthier futures. May these three decades be the prelude to many more, marked by innovative leadership, applied research, and unconditional service to the community—always honoring life, health, and the well-being of our population.