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New IHPR Web site

The IHPR's new Web site is now online. Be sure to visit it at www.IHPR.uthscsa.edu.

IHPR Job Opportunities

The IHPR currently has several open positions. They are listed on the Web site of the Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics at The University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio: [click here](#).

Join the IHPR's Research Networks

The IHPR directs two national networks geared to increase Latino health. Visit and join *Redes En Acción*: The National Latino Cancer Research Network at www.redesenaccion.org and *Salud America!* The RWJF Research Network to Prevent Obesity Among Latino Children at www.salud-america.org.

Share Your News

We welcome your news items, story ideas and suggestions. Please send them to IHPR@uthscsa.edu to be featured in our quarterly E-newsletter.

IHPR's patient navigator program helping U.S. Latina cancer patients

Mary Jane Torres was in disbelief when a cervical cancer screening found a uterine mass. How could the San Antonio grandmother undergo treatment, surgery and a struggle to survive with no car to get to clinic appointments and few relatives for support?

Many Latinas face similar, daunting barriers to cancer care.

But Torres got the support she needed thanks to a patient navigator program led by the Institute for Health Promotion Research (IHPR) at The University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio. The program, expected to be launched nationally in late 2008, trains "navigators" to help Latinas access cancer care services.

"The patient navigator helped me with transportation and was there for me at the time of need. She got me helpful medical information when I couldn't. She helped me schedule my appointments," said Torres, whose uterine mass turned out to be benign and was removed before it could become cancerous. "She even accompanied me to my surgery, which I really appreciated because I did not have anybody to go with me."

IHPR investigators have spent two years pilot-testing a patient navigator program, funded by Pfizer, Inc., for Latinas with abnormal breast and cervical cancer screening results.

In the pilot program, patient navigator Sandra Veronica Covarrubias facilitates clinic visits, appointment reminders, resources and language-specific health information for patients from two community clinics in a low-income, Latino area of San Antonio.

"This program has helped patients feel secure



Mary Jane Torres with grandchildren Melody and Brandon Hernandez

that they'll receive treatment they need and won't fall through the cracks in a health care system that otherwise can make them feel lost or confused," Covarrubias said.

IHPR Director Dr. Amelie G. Ramirez, who led the pilot program, now is developing a national patient navigation program through her *Redes En Acción*: The National Latino Cancer Research Network. The program will recruit and provide patient navigation to Latinas with abnormal breast cancer screening results in each of the six *Redes* sites – New York, Miami, Houston, San Antonio, San Francisco and San Diego.

Patients will be given pre- and post-intervention surveys to gauge their feelings about the cancer screening, diagnosis and treatment experience following participation in the study. Implementation process evaluation will involve monitoring navigator activities and interactions with patients and the health system. Outcome data will be derived from patient clinical records, scheduling information, patient satisfaction survey results and interviews with health care personnel.

Continued on Page 6 ▶

Director's Corner

From IHPR Director Dr. Amelie G. Ramirez

It is the glory and greatness of our tradition to speak for those who have no voice, to remember those who are forgotten, to respond to the frustrations and fulfill the aspirations of all Americans seeking a better life in a better land."

In 1980, U.S. Sen. Edward Kennedy spoke those words, and they remain true today.

In fact, the Institute for Health Promotion Research (IHPR) at The University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio is doing its part to keep alive the great American tradition of improving the lives of the disadvantaged and voiceless.

The IHPR, founded in 2006 as a unit of the School of Medicine at The University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio, investigates the causes and solutions to the unequal impact of cancer and other chronic diseases among certain populations, including

Hispanics/Latinos, in San Antonio, South Texas and the nation. We use evidence-guided research, training and community outreach to improve the health of those who are at a disadvantage due to race/ethnicity or social determinants.

And as the IHPR approaches its second birthday in October 2008, we're making great strides toward reducing health disparities. Health disparities are differences in the disease burden among certain population groups compared to non-Hispanic whites.

The IHPR's list of active and in-development grants and programs is growing thanks to Health Science Center support and funding from the National Institutes of Health and many other private organizations. We recently launched *Salud America!* The RWJF Research Network to Prevent Obesity Among Latino Children to increase the number of scientists



Dr. Amelie Ramirez

engaged in Latino childhood obesity research to seek environmental and policy solutions to the epidemic. *Redes En Acción*: The National Latino Cancer Research Network continues to fuel great projects. We also recently opened a satellite office at the Regional Academic Health Center in Harlingen, Texas.

And now we've implemented a new IHPR

Web site and this E-newsletter to keep you informed of what we and others are doing to reduce health disparities.

I sincerely hope that you will join us, via potential collaboration or communication opportunities, in our fight to keep Sen. Kennedy's vision of America intact.

Please feel free to e-mail us by [clicking here](#).

Dr. Amelie G. Ramirez
Director, IHPR

New IHPR Faculty Profile: Dr. Deborah Parra-Medina

By the time she finished her first month at the Institute for Health Promotion Research (IHPR), researcher Dr. Deborah Parra-Medina already had submitted two federal grant proposals focused on Hispanic/Latino health disparities.

This ability to hit the ground running is no surprise to IHPR Director Dr. Amelie G. Ramirez, who's worked with Dr. Parra-Medina at a distance for more than 15 years.

"Deborah possesses an outstanding track record of obtaining grant funding and publishing her research findings," Dr. Ramirez said. "She is energetic, well-organized and she shares our passion to improve quality of life in underserved communities."



Dr. Deborah Parra-Medina

Drs. Ramirez and Parra-Medina first worked together on the NCI-funded National Hispanic Leadership Initiative on Cancer (NHLIC) led by Dr. Ramirez. Dr. Parra-Medina was the project coordinator for the San Diego region. "I received much encouragement from NHLIC investigators to pursue my PhD," Dr. Parra-Medina said. "In fact, Amelie wrote me letter of

recommendation for admission into the PhD program."

After Dr. Parra-Medina completed her PhD, she joined the University of South Carolina faculty. She and Dr. Ramirez would collaborate again in 2000 when Dr. Ramirez received NCI funding for *Redes En Acción*. Dr. Parra-Medina was the first junior faculty member to receive a pilot grant from the *Redes* network, and she received the network's Rising Star in

Fun Facts

Hometown: San Diego, Calif.

Family: Husband, Edgar, and children, Gabriella, 18, Celeste, 12, and Edgar Jr., 5

Hobbies: Reading, gardening, spending time with kids

Favorite foods: "Americanized" Thai and Mediterranean food

Favorite movies: Romantic comedies – "This summer, *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants 2* and *Mamma Mia!* were the 'must-sees' on my list. I also thought *Juno* was great."

Favorite book(s): "I am currently reading the *Twilight* series with my daughters."

Cancer Research award.

Dr. Parra-Medina has quickly gained a reputation as a leader in health promotion, public health epidemiology, and health disparities in cancer and cardiovascular disease. She has vast experience in community-based interventional trials, participatory research methods, and primary prevention of chronic diseases.

Among her many projects, she has used strategies to foster individual and organizational empowerment among Latinos for cancer control and prevention and developed a program that teamed middle schools and local community groups to create physical activity opportunities for girls.

"I had been at the University of South Carolina for almost 10 years and, while the Latino population is growing, it still lacks the critical mass to develop a nationally recognized Hispanic health research program," Dr. Parra-Medina said. "I want to be at a university where Latino health is a priority. I want to be an active part of mentoring future generations of Latino health professionals and researchers."

IHPR report is 'roadmap' of South Texas' health disparities

Obesity and diabetes are the two most significant health disparities in South Texas, according to the *South Texas Health Status Review*, an April 2008 report produced by the Institute for Health Promotion Research (IHPR) at The University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio.

The *Review* urges health workers, researchers, and policymakers to focus their efforts on reducing obesity because of its link to many other major health issues.

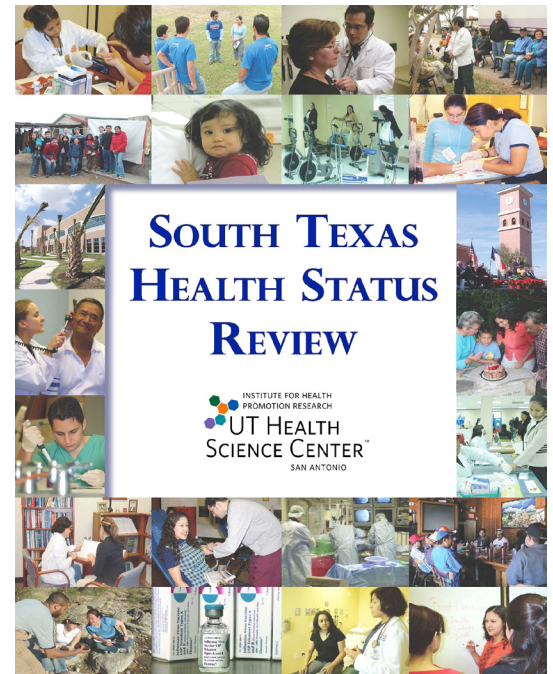
The *Review* also indicates that South Texas is at a disadvantage from the rest of Texas for 10 of the 30 other health indicators analyzed aside from obesity, including birth defects and cervical, liver, stomach and gallbladder cancers.

"Our *Review* found that inequalities exist in obesity and several other health issues in South Texas, especially among Latinos, compared to those who live in the rest of Texas

or nation," said Dr. Amelie G. Ramirez, IHPR director and review leader. "We hope researchers, health workers and policymakers use our *Review* to plan research and interventions to address these disparities and improve health."

The IHPR partnered with the Health Science Center's Regional Academic Health Center and the Texas Department of State Health Services to collect, analyze and organize county, state and national data for the *Review*.

The *Review* compares South Texas' incidence, prevalence and mortality rates for nearly three-dozen health indicators – from AIDS to cancer to obesity to homicide – to the rest of Texas and the nation by age, sex, race/ethnicity and rural/urban location. This analysis determined what health disparities impact South Texans,



a largely Latino population that is lacking in health care, income, and insurance.

[Click here](#) to read the full *Review* online.

IHPR Research Briefs

IHPR to conduct new research

IHPR investigators have been awarded several new grants so far in 2008, in addition to its ongoing research projects and networks:

- ▶ In March 2008, the IHPR and researcher Dr. Luis Velez teamed with the San Antonio Municipal Health District to form a tobacco control and prevention coalition in San Antonio.
- ▶ In April 2008, IHPR researcher Emma Mancha was awarded a *Redes En Acción* minority grant supplement that will use Texas Cancer Registry data to geo-reference and map the incidence of childhood leukemia to ascertain its geographic distribution in South Texas. Mancha's study, funded at \$114,002 for two years, will guide the development and implementation of targeted policy, health services and community interventions for this region.

- ▶ In April 2008, IHPR researcher Dr. Deborah Parra-Medina was awarded a two-year, \$387,000 grant from the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI) for her "ENLACE" project to promote physical activity among Mexican immigrant women in South Carolina and South Texas' Lower Rio Grande Valley.

Salud America! is readying to fight Latino childhood obesity

Salud America! The RWJF Research Network to Prevent Obesity Among Latino Children is building up its efforts to address Latino childhood obesity. The network has recruited more than 1,000 members as of August 2008 and is analyzing survey data that will help create a Latino childhood obesity research agenda to guide a December 2008 call for proposals (CFP) for pilot research grants that address Latino childhood obesity. Each pilot grant will award up to \$75,000 over two years. [Click here](#) for more information.

Recent scientific articles from IHPR investigators

IHPR investigators have published several articles in scientific journals so far in 2008. Here are just a few of the most recent ones:

- ▶ Ramirez, A., Vela, L., & Cigarroa, F.G. 2008. A model for health professional education in South Texas. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, 7, (2), 183-194.
- ▶ Ramirez, A.G., Miller, A.R., Gallion, K., San Miguel, S., Chalela, P., & Garcia, S.G. 2008. Testing three different cancer genetics registry recruitment methods with Hispanic cancer patients and their family members previously registered in local cancer registries in Texas. *Community Genetics*, 11, (4), 215-223.
- ▶ Ramirez, A.G., Wildes, K., Talavera G., Nápoles-Springer, A., Gallion, K., & Pérez-Stable, E.J. 2008. Clinical trial attitudes and practices of Latino physicians. *Contemporary Clinical Trials*, 29, (4), 482-92.

IHPR, new research associate gearing up for local cancer prevention program

The Institute for Health Promotion Research (IHPR) moved one step closer to launching *Salud San Antonio!*, a cancer prevention program on San Antonio's predominantly Latino West Side, with its hiring of research associate Courtney Denton in spring 2008.

Denton will talk to women in church and community groups to raise awareness about breast cancer, the most commonly diagnosed cancer among Latinas, and cervical cancer, which affects Latinas more than any other group.

The five-year survival rate for early-stage breast cancer is 90 percent, and 80 percent of cervical cancer deaths could be prevented by regular screening, research shows.

"These facts speak to the importance of education about early detection and prevention among women at higher risk of cancer," Denton said. "It is our hope that the *Salud San Antonio!* program can educate, encourage and empower the West Side to beat these statistics."

Denton will work closely with IHPR researchers Drs. Luis Velez and Patricia Chalela for the project, which is led by IHPR Director Dr. Amelie G. Ramirez.

Denton recently received a master of public health degree from the University of Texas School of Public Health and is a 2004 graduate of Trinity University in San Antonio. She has work experience in the health care field and was director of the Interfaith Hospitality Network of the Foundation for the Homeless in Austin, Texas. She also is involved with several community and health organizations.



Courtney Denton

IHPR News Briefs

IHPR opens satellite office in Harlingen, Texas

The Institute for Health Promotion Research (IHPR) opened a new satellite office at the Health Science Center's Regional Academic Health Center in Harlingen, Texas, in August 2008. The site will help the IHPR translate its efforts into community-based interventions and clinical practice in Texas' Lower Rio Grande Valley, one of the most socioeconomically disadvantaged areas of the U.S. Newly hired research instructor Dr. Jennifer Salinas will work out of the IHPR's Harlingen office. Dr. Salinas, who recently completed a two-year post-doctoral training fellowship in minority aging at the University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston, is a population-based researcher with expertise in health and migration in Mexican-origin populations whose research approach incorporates the theoretical prospect of the

social determinants of health and that societal structures create health disparities through inequalities in socioeconomic status and access to healthcare services and knowledge.

Magazine: IHPR director tackling one of "world's toughest problems"

Hispanic Magazine, a national publication with a circulation of 280,000, lauded IHPR Director Dr. Amelie G. Ramirez as one of five Latinas making a positive difference in the world in its June/July 2008 issue. The magazine touts her work to curb Latino childhood obesity. "However big or small the challenge, the act of changing one thing can set into motion a positive chain of events. These five women from different parts of the country have decided to help make a change. From assisting immigrant women to work without fear, to halting the

increase in childhood obesity, to educating Hispanic women about the importance of voting, these fearless five have taken it upon themselves to chip away at some of the modern world's toughest problems," according to the magazine. [Click here](#) to view the article.

IHPR director spreads word about need to boost Latino health

IHPR Director Dr. Amelie G. Ramirez has lectured and presented material at more than a dozen local and national conferences in 2008. She spoke about everything from how to recruit more Latinos into clinical trials to the need for multi-level interventions to reduce Latino childhood obesity to efforts that impact policies to improve Latino health. Among her larger audiences were the Texas Cancer Council, Universidad del Este University of Puerto Rico, National Hispanic Medical Association, National

Latino Cancer Summit, and a Dana Farber CME conference on breast cancer.

IHPR faculty/staff win awards

IHPR Director Dr. Amelie G. Ramirez was elected to the Institute of Medicine (IOM) of the National Academies in October 2007. The IOM, established in 1970 as an honorific membership organization and an advisory group, is a national resource for independent, scientifically informed analysis and recommendations on human health issues... Celia Thompson, an administrative assistant at the IHPR, was named a Ford Motor Co. "Warrior in Pink" in late 2007, giving Thompson the chance to share the inspirational tale of her and her daughter's breast cancer survival in Ford press materials and promotional events to raise breast cancer awareness among Hispanics.

Children in non-English-speaking homes face health disparities

Children in U.S. households where English is not the primary language suffer many health care disparities, according to UT Southwestern Medical Center researchers.

The study, available in June's online issue of *Pediatrics*, used National Survey of Children's Health data to identify disparities in medical and dental health between primarily English-speaking and non-English primary language (NEPL) children, according to a UT Southwestern news release.

The researchers found that children in homes where English is not the primary language are significantly more likely than their English-speaking counterparts to be poor and Latino or Asian/Pacific Islander. NEPL children also are more likely to be overweight, have only fair or poor dental health, and be uninsured or sporadically insured.

"These children are more likely to live in low-income households," said Dr. Glenn Flores, study author and UT Southwestern pediatrician, in the news release. "Clinicians providing care for them should make sure caregivers are aware of programs documented to benefit poor children."

To identify, monitor and eliminate health care disparities, Dr. Flores recommends collecting data on the primary language spoken at home for all patients and improving access to medical interpreters and cultural competency training.

"In Texas alone, 7.3 million families speak languages other than English at home," Dr. Flores said. "It's imperative that our health care system recognizes on a nationwide scale how language is affecting health care for NEPL children."



Dr. Glenn Flores

News Briefs

Where you live plays role in health care you receive

The place you live plays a significant role in the health care you receive, according to research cited in a *Prevention* article July 1. The article lists region-by-region facts and local items of questionable or progressive health practices, and how to use such information to access the best health care possible. View the article [here](#).

LAF launches Web site to aid Hispanic/Latino cancer survivors

The Lance Armstrong Foundation recently launched www.livestrong.org/espanol, a Spanish-language Web site

that provides information on the common physical, emotional and day-to-day concerns of Hispanic/Latino cancer survivors. In addition to cancer information, the site includes 16 videos of Hispanic/Latino cancer survivors sharing their experiences with cancer.

Latinos can get health information from new toll-free hotline

The National Alliance for Hispanic Health has a toll-free hotline for Latinos looking for health information, according to a July 7, 2008, entry on the Triage blog of the *Chicago Tribune*. Callers to the national alliance's Su Familia help line, 1-866-783-2645, can speak with bilingual staff members about many health issues and can get information on local providers, if needed.

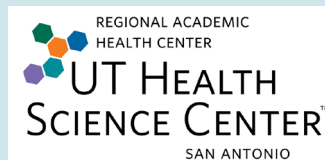
RAHC Corner

RAHC scientists are 'TB detectives'

Investigators at the Regional Academic Health Center (RAHC) campus in Edinburg are conducting many studies focusing on tuberculosis (TB), a disease that is thriving along the Texas-Mexico border, according to a report in the *Valley Morning Star*. Statistics show that Cameron and Hidalgo counties each had consistently high numbers of TB cases in 2006, much more than the handful of cases in most other Texas counties. That, and the fact that the RAHC has a special lab for the purpose of studying diseases like TB, is why researchers are coming to the RAHC to study the disease, said Dr. Leonel Vela, RAHC regional dean, in the story, which can be found [here](#).

RAHC gets new UT admissions office

The University of Texas recently opened an admissions office at the Regional Academic Health Center (RAHC) to attract more students from the Rio Grande Valley to the university's Austin campus. The office will serve prospective UT students and parents with resources, financial aid information and one-on-one counseling. Cameron, Willacy, Hidalgo and Starr counties currently produce about 1,200 UT Austin students and receive \$16 million in financial aid, UT officials said. The new admissions office at the RAHC is the fifth such center in Texas, joining Austin, Houston, Dallas and San Antonio. Read more [here](#).



Latino Health Q&A

Q: At what age should Latinas start getting an annual mammogram? Why are they important?

A: All women age 40 or older should have a breast cancer screening mammogram every year. For Latinas, mammograms are extremely important because breast cancer is the leading cause of cancer mortality among Latinas, according to the American Cancer Society. Our research and others' research also shows that Hispanic women are less likely to utilize mammography services than non-Hispanic white women and, consequently, more likely to be diagnosed at a more advanced stage of the disease, when fewer treatment options are available, resulting in poorer outcomes and higher mortality. In fact, only 41.7% of Latinas age 40 and older have regular mammograms. And those Latinas who do get screened are more likely to delay or miss follow-up appointments – delays in diagnosis after an abnormal mammogram are associated with advanced stages of the disease, larger tumor size, and reduced survival. So mammograms are very important for Latinas.

For more information, read the *Redes En Acción*-produced *Buena Vida* magazines [here](#) or check out the National Cancer Institute's mammogram fact sheet [here](#).

— Dr. Patricia Chalela,
Assistant Professor of Epidemiology and Biostatistics
at the Institute for Health Promotion Research
at The University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio



Dr. Patricia Chalela

Patient navigator

► *Continued from Page 1*

"We hope this can improve Hispanic women's access to quality, timely cancer care and improve treatment outcomes in many communities where Hispanic women encounter significant disparities in cancer health care delivery," Dr. Ramirez said.

The program made Torres a believer of patient navigation's benefits.

"Now at least, I feel more confidence in myself. If I need help I can call the patient navigator and she will direct me in the right direction," she said. "Before, I really didn't know how to get around, and people from the clinic didn't have the answers I needed."

About the E-newsletter

This E-newsletter is produced quarterly by the Institute for Health Promotion Research. Please send news items or story ideas to IHPR@uthscsa.edu.

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Grants

Finding Answers: Disparities Research for Change, a University of Chicago program supported by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, has opened its third round of grant awards to support rigorous evaluations of practical and replicable solutions designed to reduce and eliminate disease-specific racial and ethnic health care disparities. Awards range from \$100,000 to \$275,000. The deadline for receipt of brief proposals is Sept. 18. [Click here](#) to visit the program's Web site for more details.

Events

IHPR helps organize first-ever SALSI health disparities forum

The Institute for Health Promotion Research (IHPR) at The University of Texas Health Science Center is helping organize the first-ever San Antonio Life Sciences Institute (SALSI) Health Disparities Research Forum on Sept. 12, 2008. SALSI was funded by the UT System in 2003 to stimulate joint research between the Health Science Center and UT San Antonio (UTSA), and ultimately increase federal funding. IHPR Director Dr. Amelie G. Ramirez and Health Science Center VP for Research Dr. Brian Herman will host the SALSI forum, which is open to 60 invited researchers and community leaders whose work addresses a wide range of health disparities.

SOPHE annual meeting in San Diego

The Society for Public Health Education has scheduled its 59th Annual Meeting Oct. 23-25, 2008 in San Diego, Calif. The theme is *Catching the Wave: Changing the Tides of Health Education and Health Promotion*. Dramatic shifts in demographics, culture, language and economics present new challenges for health educators. [Click here](#) to visit the organization's Web site.

APHA annual meeting in San Diego

The American Public Health Association will host its 136th Annual Meeting Oct. 25-29, 2008 in San Diego, California. The conference, Public Health Without Borders, will explore transnational public health and provide a forum to address a diversity of topics. [Click here](#) to visit the conference Web site.

Salud America! planning first-ever summit meeting

Salud America! The RWJF Research Network to Prevent Obesity Among Latino Children is planning the first of a series of scientific conferences on Sept. 9-11, 2009, to inform about the latest research and findings about Latino childhood obesity. [Click here](#) to see details and updates posted on the program Web site.