Latinas Interested in Genetic Testing for Breast Cancer Risk, But Knowledge and Cultural Barriers Persist

SAN ANTONIO, Texas (July 30, 2012)—Latinas tend to have positive attitudes and strong interest in genetic testing for breast cancer risk, yet lacked general knowledge about testing, its risks and benefits, according to a new study led by researchers at the Institute for Health Promotion Research (IHPR) at the UT Health Science Center at San Antonio.

The study, published recently in the journal *Community Medicine & Health Education*, conducted focus groups with 58 Latinas in Hidalgo County, a largely Latino part of South Texas.

Researchers used analyzed focus group responses and themes and uncovered several cultural factors, such as religious beliefs, that impacted Latinas’ decisions to get genetic testing.

“Key Latino values—religiosity, importance of family and the influential role of health care providers in health decisions—should be considered when designing strategies to deliver culturally adapted risk information to increase and ensure Latinas’ understanding of breast cancer genetic testing during their decision-making processes,” said Dr. Amelie G. Ramirez, the study’s corresponding author and director of the IHPR at the Health Science Center.

Genetic testing for breast cancer risk may facilitate better-informed decisions regarding cancer prevention, risk reduction, early detection, and better determination of risk for family members.

However, among women who are tested, less than 4% are Latina.

Finding reasons for Latinas’ low participation was the goal of Dr. Ramirez and her team, which included IHPR researchers Dr. Patricia Chalela and Edgar Muñoz and investigators from the University of North Texas Health Science Center and the University of Texas-Pan American.

The researchers found that none of the focus group participants had ever had a genetic test, and most didn’t know what the test was or how it is done.

Most women, after learning what a genetic test was, indicated they would get a genetic test in the next six months if it were available—at no or low cost—to be able to prevent cancer through healthy lifestyle changes or act as soon as possible to treat disease.

But among some of lesser-educated focus group participants, lack of accurate information about testing and cultural beliefs may hinder their use of genetic testing for breast cancer.

For example, some Latina participants viewed God as the only one who can cure cancer, which might impact their preventive health behaviors. And given Latinos’ tendency to trust the advice
of health care providers, some Latinas who lacked health insurance or access to a regular 
doctor may have fewer opportunities to learn about genetic testing.

“Further research is needed to identify effective ways to communicate genetic risk susceptibility 
information to Latinas to help them make informed testing decisions,” Ramirez said.

Read more about the study at http://bit.ly/SUr6Eg.

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**The Institute for Health Promotion Research (IHPR) at The University of Texas Health Science 
Center at San Antonio** investigates the causes and solutions to the unequal impact of cancer and 
chronic disease among certain populations, including Latinos, in San Antonio, South Texas and the 
nation. The IHPR, founded in 2006, uses evidence-guided research, training and community 
outreach to improve the health of those at a disadvantage due to race/ethnicity or social 
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