Giving Latinas a Chance Against Breast Cancer

Dr. Amelie Ramirez, director of the Institute for Health Promotion Research (IHPR) at the UT Health Science Center at San Antonio, was recently named a “Champion of Change” by the White House for her contributions to ending suffering from breast cancer.

Now Ramirez has written a blog post for the White House.

The inspirational post, “Giving Latinas a Chance against Breast Cancer,” highlights Latinas’ cancer issues and discusses ways to overcome barriers.

Here is an excerpt:

Latinas are 20% more likely to die of breast cancer than white women diagnosed at similar ages and stages. Few Latinas recognize breast cancer often progresses slowly enough to be detected and treated. And even if Latinas are screened, they are more likely to delay/miss follow-up appointments and start treatment later once cancer is confirmed — leading to worse cancer outcomes.

But Latinas also need to know: Breast cancer doesn’t have to kill.

Prevention is the key, and timely screening, diagnosis, treatment, and follow-up care are critical if Latinas are to survive cancer and sustain a good quality of life.

That’s why my Institute for Health Promotion Research at The University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio, in partnership with the Cancer Therapy and Research Center and agencies like Susan G. Komen for the Cure and the Lance Armstrong Foundation, is doing research that engages the community to help them make better health choices and break down cancer barriers.

The full post features Dr. Ramirez’ Latino cancer PSAs and booklets.
I’d like to invite breast cancer survivors to join a San Antonio-area study that is testing how different types of exercise — like yoga — best improve cancer survivors’ fitness and quality of life and decreases the risk of recurrence.

The project, Improving Mind and Physical ACTivity (IMPACT), is led by the Institute for Health Promotion Research (IHPR) at the UT Health Science Center at San Antonio.

Over the yearlong IMPACT study, funded by Susan G. Komen for the Cure, 90 breast cancer survivors will be randomized to participate at least three times a week in: 1) a comprehensive exercise “prescription” featuring an individualized aerobic, strength-training and flexibility program; 2) a yoga exercise program; or 3) general exercise chosen at will.

Study recruitment is underway. For eligibility, call 210-593-2669.

My team on this study, which includes Dr. Daniel Hughes of the IHPR and translational scientists from the Cancer Therapy and Research Center, expect the comprehensive and yoga-focused participants to have better fitness outcomes, less stress and improved biological indicators of future risk of secondary cancers.

Participants in all three groups will take a fitness test and undergo measurements at the start and end of the study, and also fill out surveys and exercise logs.

Thank you for your consideration.

Dr. Amelie G. Ramirez
Director, IHPR

In the late 1980s, Dora Alicia Gonzalez helped do one of the first assessments of socioeconomics and health care locations in her native Brownsville, Texas.

She even helped write a 300-page report — page by page — on a typewriter.

Gonzalez said the experience, even despite its arduous typing task, sparked her interest in public health and improving the lives of the underserved.

Over the last 20 years she has helped meet the needs of uninsured residents as part of a primary health care agency, and also fostered community-based partnerships and developed and implemented cancer education training sessions along the Texas-Mexico border for the National Cancer Institute (NCI).

Today, Gonzalez builds community health as a program coordinator at the Institute for Health Promotion Research (IHPR) at The UT Health Science Center at San Antonio.

The need of services for the underserved, uninsured, and low-literacy Hispanic populations motivate me to continue to work in this field,” Gonzalez said.

At the IHPR, Gonzalez coordinates ¡Salud del Valle!, an NCI-funded project that uses her skills as a community health educator to do educational presentations that increase the knowledge of breast and cervical cancer screening among Latinas in South Texas.

She also brings cancer prevention messages to residents via clinics, churches, cancer support groups, health fairs and more, and recruits Latino cancer survivors to use LIVESTRONG cancer navigation services.

“I most enjoy being able to educate Hispanics about available resources and make sure that they know all about cancer prevention and screening,” Gonzalez said. “I also enjoy maintaining partnerships with community, regional and state groups.”
Depression after Cancer Keeps Latinas from Follow-Up Care

Depression may prevent Latina breast cancer survivors from getting preventive follow-up care, such as ovarian cancer screening, according to a new study.

The study, led by Dr. Amelie G. Ramirez, director of the Institute for Health Promotion Research at the UT Health Science Center at San Antonio, was highlighted at the 4th American Association for Cancer Research (AACR) Conference on The Science of Cancer Health Disparities on Sept. 19, 2011 in Washington, D.C.

“Depression can make people more inattentive to potential risks to their health and more likely to ignore recommendations to reduce their risk,” Ramirez said.

Because depression is more common among breast cancer patients than the general population and because 10% of all new cancers are diagnosed in cancer survivors, Ramirez and colleagues examined the extent of depression among a group of 117 Latina breast cancer survivors to assess the barriers that were thwarting preventive health screening for colorectal and ovarian cancer.

Of the women surveyed, one-third met the criteria for depression.

“The most important thing we found was that Latina breast cancer survivors were more depressed than Hispanics in the general population, and they were not following recommendations to continue their other cancer screening behaviors,” Ramirez said.

Only five of women surveyed had been screened for both colorectal and ovarian cancers, and about 60% had not been screened for one cancer or the other.

About Depression

Watch this video about the causes, symptoms and treatments of depression from the National Institute of Mental Health

Ramirez said that a broad-based preventive strategy is needed to increase screening and healthy behaviors among Latinas, as well as the underpinnings of survivors’ depression.

“We have to ask the critical questions to make sure that these patients are not only getting the follow-up treatment they need, but also are screened for depression,” she said.

Read a San Antonio Express-News report on the study.

IHPR Articles and Presentations

Articles

Presentations
- Amelie Ramirez, IHPR. “The Unequal Burden of Cancer in Our Communities.” Éxito! Summer Institute (led by the IHPR), June 2-6, 2011, San Antonio.
- Dan Hughes, IHPR. “Building a Career in Research: Role Models Tell Their Story.” Éxito! Summer Institute, June 2-6, 2011, San Antonio.
Now in Spanish: Manual for ‘Navigating’ Latino Patients

Researchers at the Institute for Health Promotion Research (IHPR) at The UT Health Science Center at San Antonio have created a Spanish version of the new manual, A Patient Navigation Manual for Latino Audiences: The Redes En Acción Experience, to help health organizations develop patient navigation services for Latinos.

Check out the manual in Spanish or English. The manual first introduces patient navigators, who are trained health workers who aim to help “navigate” underserved Latinos through the often-complex healthcare system and remove barriers to timely, quality care.

It also offers a six-step guide to see if navigation is right for a health organization, and highlights important elements for implementing navigation.

Tools, customizable templates and resources are available to help launch navigation.

“We are excited to offer, for free, this guide in both English and Spanish to help healthcare providers and groups integrate patient navigation into their scope of services,” said IHPR Director Dr. Amelie G. Ramirez. “We have found that patient navigation is a valuable strategy to reduce barriers faced by the Latino population, and in turn increase timely delivery of healthcare services.”

The manual was made possible by Redes En Acción: The National Latino Cancer Research Network, a National Cancer Institute (NCI) project headquartered at the IHPR. Spanish translation was generously provided by the NCIs Office of Latin American Cancer Program Development.

IHPR News Briefs

IHPR Research Featured at APHA Meeting

Several IHPR researchers presented research at the American Public Health Association (APHA) 139th Annual Meeting Oct. 31, 2011, in Washington D.C. Presentations included:

▶ “Using SMS to Automate Data Collection and Deliver Health Promotion Messages: The Be Fit with Friends (BFF) Solution,” Dr. Deborah Parra-Medina

▶ “Protecting Privacy in Messaging Systems Used in Health Promotion Research,” Dr. Deborah Parra-Medina

▶ “A Community-driven Approach to Physical Activity Promotion for Adolescent Girls Using Text Messaging and Social Media,” Laura Esparza

▶ “Sexual Initiation, Parenting Practices and Acculturation in Hispanic Seventh Graders,” Dr. Daisy Morales-Campos

▶ “Hispanic Mothers and High School Girls Perspectives on HPV Vaccine Uptake,” Dr. Daisy Morales-Campos

▶ “An Obesity Management Intervention for Hispanic Children in a Pediatric Clinic: Preliminary Outcomes Analysis,” Dorothy Long Parma

IHPR’s Dr. Ramirez Adds New Leadership Roles

IHPR Director Dr. Amelie G. Ramirez has taken a pair of leadership roles that will further her efforts to study cancer and improve the health of residents in South Texas and beyond. Ramirez joined the national advisory committee for the RWJF Health & Society Scholars Program. She also was elected director-at-large by members of the American Society of Preventive Oncology (ASPO), which advocates for cancer prevention and control research.

Obesity Society Lauds IHPR Abstract

IHPR researcher Dr. Deborah Parra-Medina’s abstract, “Preliminary Results from an Obesity Management Intervention in a Rural Pediatric Practice: The NEST Study,” received the 2011 Diversity Tour Abstract Award for Excellence in Science with a Focus on Diverse Populations from the Obesity Society on Oct. 3. The Obesity Society encourages research on and awareness of obesity.

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Èxito! Program Helps Latinos Seek Doctoral Degrees, Research Careers

Below are inspiring testimonials from two graduates of the 2011 Summer Institute of Èxito! Latino Cancer Research Leadership Training, the Institute for Health Promotion Research’s program that encourages Latino master’s-level students or health professionals to pursue a doctoral degree and careers studying how cancer affects Latinos differently. Read more testimonials here.

Apply here by March 1, 2012, for the next Èxito! Summer Institute and internships.

Èxito! Grad: Mary V. Diaz Santana
Puerto Rico

Mary Vanellys Diaz Santana values the richness of culture and faith in her native Puerto Rico, but also understands how different cultural aspects can be barriers and enablers to public health.

Santana’s strong passion for investigating the distribution, frequency and determinants of health led her to the University of Puerto Rico’s medical sciences campus, where she is pursuing a master’s degree in epidemiology.

Her capable mentors have shaped her desire to start a career in cancer and chronic disease research.

One of her mentors encouraged Santana to learn more at Èxito! Latino Cancer Research Leadership Training, which aims to increase diversity in Latino health disparities and cancer research by encouraging Latino master’s-level students and master’s trained health professionals to pursue a doctoral degree and a career in research.

By the end of the five-day Èxito! Summer Institute in June 2011, Santana acquired the knowledge, skill, and networking necessary for successfully applying to a PhD program.

“I believe that Èxito! validated my decision to pursue a career in cancer research, it enhanced my vision about cancer disparities among Hispanics, and increased my awareness of how this population suffers disproportionately from cancer,” Santana said. “Cancer research is an opportunity for lessening the burden of cancer, and Èxito! helped me to realize that I want to work towards that.”

Èxito! Grad: Laura Reyes
San Antonio, Texas

Laura Reyes is a native South Texan who developed a thirst for knowledge early in life, often visiting the library as a child with her mother, who was going through grad school.

As she continued to seek knowledge, her interest in science and the human body grew, and she eventually attended Loyola New Orleans University. Then the Hurricane Katrina disaster brought her back to San Antonio — a fortuitous transfer to St. Mary’s University that eventually got her interested in research techniques.

Reyes now is a master’s of public health student at the UT School of Public Health’s San Antonio campus, where she heard about Èxito! Latino Cancer Research Leadership Training from professors and mentors.

She was attracted to Èxito! — which aims to increase diversity in Latino health disparities and cancer research by encouraging Latino master’s-level students and master’s trained health professionals to pursue a doctoral degree and a career in research — because she felt it would be a good way to learn more about cancer and the nuts and bolts of pursuing a doctoral degree.

She also saw it as an opportunity to network and meet new peers.

At the Èxito! Summer Institute in June 2011, Reyes said she was inspired by hearing from several guest speakers, including cancer researchers and professors, who talked about their life stories and career paths.

“Èxito! has opened up my eyes to cancer research,” said Reyes, who is interested in pursuing a dual PhD/MD program with a concentration in epidemiology. “Because of Èxito! I have read books regarding cancer research and have more of an interest and knowledge of cancer and cancer research.”
San Antonio Schools Unveiling Salad Bars in Cafeterias

Schools have a new weapon in the battle against childhood obesity — salad bars.

Research has shown that school children with access to a salad bar significantly increase their consumption of fruits and vegetables, says Caroline Roffidal-Blanco, a registered dietitian with the San Antonio Municipal Health District.

That’s why local schools are getting more than 100 salad bars this year.

“Students unanimously indicated they would prefer a salad bar as a healthy meal option at school,” said Roffidal-Blanco of local middle- and high-school students who partook in a recent panel discussion on healthy lifestyle issues.

The San Antonio salad bar initiative, part of the national Let’s Move Salad Bars to Schools program that aims to provide 6,000 salad bars to schools nationwide, is expected to help more than 100,000 local students eat healthier.

San Antonio now joins New York and Chicago as the cities with the most salad bars.

In addition to salad bars, the city also has a variety of other initiatives to reduce and prevent obesity thanks to a grant from the federal Communities Putting Prevention to Work program, which aims to stimulate changes to curb obesity.

Learn more about San Antonio’s campaign here.

A salad bar at Jackson Middle School in San Antonio is one of more than 100 salad bars opening in local schools this year in an effort to make fresh food more appealing, the San Antonio Express News reports. San Antonio Express-News

Texas News Tweets

Follow the IHPR’s Twitter feed, @SaludToday for all the latest news in Latino health, like:

- **Study**: Latinas Have Higher Incidence of Rare Breast Tumor (Science Daily)
- **Census Data**: 2 Factors for Texas’ High Uninsured Rate: Illegal Immigration & Hispanic Cultural Bias vs. Insurance (newsmax.com)
- **Census Data**: San Antonio’s Hispanics Are Mainly of Mexican Descent, But What Other Groups Represent? (San Antonio Express-News)
- **Data**: Bexar County Births on Decline; Hispanic Births Decline, Too, but Make Up 67% of All Births (San Antonio Express-News)
- **Report**: Texas’ Struggle vs. Child Obesity Advances, then Retreats; Law on Student Fitness Data Faces Obstacles (Texas Tribune)
- **Program**: Free Exercise Center Opens for Cancer Survivors at CTRC (Press Release)
- **Study**: Diabetes Deadlier for Mexican Americans than Anglos (Houston Chronicle)
- **Study**: Nearly Half of Latinas Who Were Normal Weight Actually Desired to be Obese (Journal Article)
I was October 2008 when I was diagnosed with Stage IIB Cervical Cancer, only three months after I had retired from the NYC Police Department and was ready to enjoy retirement with my husband.

I had not visited my GYN doctor for over three years. Why did I not go to the doctor sooner? Because of the many reasons that women use as an excuse: I was too busy, I had no time, I felt fine, I hate going to the gynecologist and I had been with my husband for over 10 years.

Looking back, I see how foolish these reasons were and the tremendous consequences that followed because I chose to be careless with my health.

Once I finally saw my gynecologist because of several symptoms, he told me I had a tumor support of my wonderful husband, family and friends, who gave me strength and made me realize the many blessings around me which comforted me, because I was scared beyond belief.

I started treatment early January 2009.

Eight weeks went by and I thought the worst of these treatments had passed. I was wrong! I started a course of internal radiation, in which the doctors inserted an implant inside my cervix with radiation rods. I had to stay in the hospital for 3 days and absolutely no visitors were allowed due to the exposure of radiation. I never felt so ALONE.

After all of these treatments had worked. Thankfully, my tumor was GONE and there were no cancer cells visible. The nightmare was over!!!

Due to lack of education and misconceptions of the disease on my part, I was embarrassed that I had cervical cancer due to HPV (a sexually transmitted infection). I couldn’t understand how I got this until I started educating myself about HPV and its link to cervical cancer.

In the U.S. alone, 12,000 women are diagnosed with cervical cancer and nearly 4,000 will die every year.

Cervical cancer is caused by “high-risk” types of the human papillomavirus (HPV), and at least 50 percent of sexually active women will have HPV at some point in their lives. Two of the major issues with this disease are lack of education and lack of screening. Early detection through Pap tests and HPV testing are key to preventing this disease from developing into cancer.

Currently, I am cancer free and I use my story to let women know that my story doesn’t have to be theirs and that they don’t have to be a statistic. I am also the NYC chapter president of Tamika and Friends, Inc., a national nonprofit organization dedicated to raising awareness about cervical cancer.

No women should die of this disease nor lose their fertility to cervical cancer.

Follow the IHPR’s Twitter feed, @SaludToday for all the latest news in Latino health, like:

- **Study**: Latinas Get More Unneeded Breast Cancer Surgery (Fox News Latino)
- **Report**: Latinas and Breast Cancer: ‘Should I Worry?’ (Huffington Post)
- **Initiative**: New Komen Campaign to Boost Latina Breast Cancer Screening (SaludToday Blog)
- **Study**: Obesity May Explain Liver Cancer Hike among Latinos (The Oncology Report)
- **Report**: Colon Cancer Testing Lags in Latinos with Family History (SaludToday Blog)

**Other Conditions**

- **Report**: Silent Killer: Tobacco Use Has a Deadly Toll among Hispanics (Press Release)
- **Report**: Diabetes and the Hispanic American Woman (empowher.com)
- **Report**: CDC Seeks to Raise Awareness of Hispanics’ Diabetes Risk (Fox News Latino)
- **Report**: Hispanic Patients Pay More to Treat High Blood Pressure (SaludToday Blog)
- **Report**: Hispanics Burdened by Asthma (Press Release)
- **Report**: Latino Leaders Call for Increased Funding to Combat Growing HIV Epidemic in Community (Hispanically Speaking News)
- **Report**: Half of Hispanics Are at Risk of Breathing Unhealthy Air (Hispanically Speaking News)
Chi-town Hero: Eddie Bocanegra Works to Interrupt Violence in Chicago’s Streets

Editor’s Note: This post is part of a series that will highlight the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation’s work in Latino communities across the country.

By SaludToday Guest Blogger: Josh Gryniewicz

Eddie Bocanegra is part of a unique group known as “violence interrupters” in the organization CeaseFire.

He works in areas of Chicago that some refer to as war zones because violence is such a pervasive and intractable problem. From January through July 2011, the city recorded 239 murders; 18% of victims and 29% of offenders were Latino.

CeaseFire, founded in 2000, applies public health approaches to stop shootings and killings. Founder Gary Slutkin believes that violence mimics infections like tuberculosis and AIDS and suggests that the response ought to mimic the way these diseases are treated: by preventing violence from being transmitted from person to person. His strategy approaches violence as a learned behavior that can, in fact, be unlearned, and attempts to control epidemics of violence by changing the norms of behavior. Ultimately, Slutkin believes that meaningful efforts to help violence-plagued communities – improving health, strengthening schools, attracting jobs – will fail to take root unless the violence stops.

Eddie Bocanegra, a 34-year-old Chicago native, has been a violence interrupter for two years. Violence interrupters intervene in conflicts throughout the city on an around-the-clock basis and even step in between a would-be shooter and victim to try to defuse a volatile situation. They also work with CeaseFire's outreach workers to counsel and mentor individuals who are most at risk of committing an act of violence and rally community members to reinforce the unacceptability of violence in their neighborhoods.

Like many of those involved in CeaseFire, Eddie Bocanegra is an ex-offender. He spent 14 years in prison for a murder he committed when he was just 17. Haunted by this action, he feels his CeaseFire work is part of his penance. He hopes to keep others from making the mistakes he did.

“Half of my life, I was in prison. That’s why I do what I do now. To me, it’s a personal thing,” he said.

Eddie Bocanegra is most deeply disturbed by the effects of violence on children. He spends much of his time with younger children in an effort to both keep them off the streets and give them support.

Eddie Bocanegra’s work and dedication is highlighted in a new documentary, “The Interrupters,” by acclaimed director Steve James and producer Alex Kotlowitz. The movie follows Eddie Bocanegra and two other CeaseFire outreach workers in their roles on Chicago’s streets, revealing how their unique street credibility helps them stop the violence and inspires journeys of hope and redemption.

A recent study by the Department of Justice found that in six of seven Chicago neighborhoods where CeaseFire has been on the ground, shootings and homicides or shootings and attempted shootings decreased by 16% to 34% due to the program.

In addition to his work with CeaseFire, Eddie Bocanegra has started a support group for mothers who have lost children to violence, and he teaches art in schools and summer programs. He is working toward a degree in social work.

Follow the IHPR’s Twitter feed, @SaludToday for all the latest news in Latino health, like:

Healthy Lifestyles
► Report: Groups Strive to Solve Latino Childhood Obesity Epidemic (Fox News Latino)
► Study: Lifetime ‘Dose’ of Excess Weight Linked to Diabetes Risk; Hispanics, Blacks Have Higher Risks (Press Release)
► Poll: Hispanic Adults’ Top Concerns for Kids: Drugs, 49%; Pregnancy, 44%; and Obesity, 44% (WebMD)
► Study: Hispanic Households Have More Hunger, Less Healthy Food (Tucson Sentinel)

Latino News Tweets
► Report: Latino Churches Increasingly Unite Healthcare with Spiritual Salvation (Fox News Latino)
► Report: Mexican Consulate in Nevada Teams w/PBS to Tackle Latino Child Obesity (KLAS-TV)

Care Issues
► Study: Hispanic Patients’ Low Engagement in Health Care System Contributes to Inequalities in Care (SaludToday Blog)
USDA Launches *MiPlato* for Spanish-Speaking Consumers

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has launched MiPlato.gov, the Spanish-language version of ChooseMyPlate.gov, which serves as a reminder to help Latino consumers make healthier food choices.

MiPlato will complement the MyPlate image as the government’s primary food group symbol, an easy-to-understand visual cue to help consumers adopt healthy eating habits consistent with the 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans.

Both images emphasize five food groups: fruits, vegetables, grains, proteins and dairy.

“USDA’s new MyPlate food icon is a simple reminder to help Americans think about their food choices in order to lead healthier lifestyles and today we are proud to introduce its Spanish-language partner, MiPlato, to help Hispanic consumers at mealtime,” said Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack. “Regardless of our primary language, it is important that we all learn about and embrace healthy eating habits because a healthy nation starts with healthy people.”

Visit [MiPlato](https://miplato.gov) or [MyPlate](https://www.choosemyplate.gov).

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**Latino Resource Tweets**

- **Materials**: Cultural Competency Tips, Tools and Resources
- **Fact Sheet**: Latinos & HIV/AIDS
- **Report**: Learn How To Prep for a Zombie Apocalypse and Real Emergencies
- **Report**: Healthy People 2010 Final Review

**Funding**

**Grant Roundup**

The following organizations have open research funding opportunities or lists:

- The U.S. Office of Minority Health
- Susan G. Komen for the Cure
- AACR
- NIH Obesity Grants
- NCCOR Obesity Grants
- RWJF
- CPRIT
- Live Smart Texas

**Ongoing Events**

**Seminars in Translational Research**

Seminars in Translational Research (STRech) unite investigators from The UT Health Science Center and UTSA in basic, clinical and social sciences to highlight the stages of the scientific translation of research discoveries.

**Continuing Education Audio Conferences**

The Teleconference Network of Texas at the UT Health Science Center at San Antonio has developed audio conferences on topics like blood banking, microbiology, nutrition updates, health education and training, social work and more. Register by calling 1-800-982-8868.

**CancerCare Workshops**

CancerCare, in partnership with Redes En Acción, which is led by the Institute for Health Promotion Research (IHPRe) at The UT Health Science Center at San Antonio, offers free workshops on many issues. Register here.

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