Promotoras Help Latino Cancer Patients Improve Their Health and Emotions

Promotoras — also known as patient navigators or community health workers — help Latino patients navigate the complex world of cancer care.

Take Guadalupe Cornejo, for example.

Cornejo, a bilingual, bicultural promotora at the Institute for Health Promotion Research (IHPR) at The UT Health Science Center at San Antonio, works in and outside clinics to provide health information and assistance to neighbors and patients.

She answers questions, helps patients make appointments and fill out medical forms and acts as a liaison between patients and the medical system.

Cornejo also offers emotional support to patients.

Cornejo’s work is improving the lives of many local patients, according to stories in the San Antonio Express-News and Ivanhoe Broadcast News.

Rudy Gamboa, a San Antonio colon cancer patient, says that his cultural connection to Cornejo helps him feel less fearful dealing with his condition.

“I know that if I have any questions or I need anything I can always call her and ask her and she’ll be there,” Gamboa told Ivanhoe Broadcast News.

Cornejo’s work is partially supported by a partnership between LIVESTRONG and Redes En Acción: The National Latino Cancer Research Network, a National Cancer Institute program based at the IHPR.

San Miguel de Majors expects promotoras and patient navigators to grow in number, especially with the government’s new "promotores de salud" campaign.

“Patient navigators are out there saving lives,” she said.

Learn all about navigators and promotoras here.
**Director’s Corner**

From IHPR Director Dr. Amelie G. Ramirez

I hope you enjoyed reading our cover story about the IHPR’s own Guadalupe Cornejo and other patient navigators, promotoras and community health workers.

We really believe they are making a difference for Latino health.

That goes for Alma Sandoval, too.

Sandoval, a promotora with the IHPR’s national Latino cancer research network, Redes En Acción, has been named “Promotora of the Year” by Spanish-language publication El Latino.

She is one of six Redes promotoras who are part of a project at Redes’ regional sites across the nation to increase Latino cancer survivors’ access to LIVESTRONG’s national navigation services. The project, which is coordinated by IHPR researcher Sandra San Miguel de Majors, includes five other promotoras: Madeline Hernández, Candy Proaño, Alicia González, Guadalupe Cornejo and Marynieves Díaz-Méndez. Sandoval is part of the San Ysidro Health Center in San Diego, a Redes regional site.

We are proud of Sandoval and all our promotoras for their dedication to improving the Latino cancer survivorship experience. It’s all part of our goal of ensuring that Latinos across the nation can get access to timely, quality cancer services.

**Dr. Amelie G. Ramirez**
Director, IHPR

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**Profile in Health & Prevention: Amelie G. Ramirez**

The San Antonio Business Journal recently profiled IHPR Director Dr. Amelie G. Ramirez, including her decades of work protecting and improving the health of Latino communities through health education, promotion and research. The article indicated that Dr. Ramirez “has no exam room, no stethoscope and no prescription pad. Yet she has impacted the health and lives of thousands of South Texans with something perhaps more powerful: Words and acción.” Read more here.

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**IHPR Staff Profile: Amanda Sintes**

In Natal, Brazil, Amanda Sintes learned the true meaning of despair.

As she walked around a children’s hospital there several years ago, she saw hopelessness in mothers’ eyes as they stood by their children who were dying of cancer.

She saw a malnourished, frail 18-month-old baby whose diaper was four sizes too big.

Sintes knew right then that she wanted to dedicate her career to helping people in need of improving their nutrition and health.

“This little girl was a physical manifestation of everything I had been studying; she made my nutrition knowledge spring to life,” said Sintes, who studied nutritional sciences at Rutgers University and later earned a master’s degree in public health from the UT Health Science Center at Houston School of Public Health. “As I stared at this little girl, I realized that the knowledge and training I have received through my schooling and knowledge of several languages could unite to help people in need.”

Sintes, a senior research area specialist at the IHPR since March 2011, now is helping Latinos in San Antonio have healthier lifestyles.

For example, she helped coordinate the IHPR’s 2nd Annual SALSI Research Forum: Latino Obesity on May 10, 2011, in San Antonio. The forum showcased innovative local strategies and programs to reduce the Latino obesity epidemic.

Sintes also is helping conduct the IHPR’s new research project, Improving Mind and Physical ACTivity. IMPACT is studying how different types of exercise best improve cancer survivors’ fitness, quality of life and more.

“I truly enjoy watching people’s lives change before my eyes,” she said. “I feel empowered when I am able to help people help themselves.”

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**Fun Facts**

Hometown: Hillsborough, N.J.
Family: Father, Mother, Sister
Hobbies: Traveling, shopping, festivals
Favorite food(s): Brazilian feijoada (black beans, rice, turkey kielbasa and beef, kosher style) and lasagna
Favorite movie(s): West Side Story
Favorite book(s): Anything related to the Holocaust and/or nutrition
IHPR’s Dr. Parra-Medina to Promote Cancer Prevention in South Texas

Dr. Deborah Parra-Medina, a professor at the Institute for Health Promotion Research (IHPR) at The UT Health Science Center at San Antonio, is leading a new project to prevent cervical cancer in South Texas.

Entre Mujeres will unite mothers and daughters (ages 11-17) in a unique setting to educate themselves about HPV—the virus that causes cervical cancer, which disproportionately affects Latinas—and the HPV vaccine.

The project is unique in that it will combine community health workers (also called promotoras) and college students from UT Pan American's Kappa Delta Chi sorority to present educational material to 1,800 mothers and daughters in Cameron and Hidalgo counties, according to Conexión, a San Antonio Express-News publication:

> The combination of promotoras who know the community and young women... will make this a unique opportunity to reach women and girls who otherwise would not be reached.

> “Cervical cancer is highly preventable,” said Deborah Parra-Medina. Parra-Medina is the principal investigator on the project that was funded by a $295,859 grant from the Cancer Prevention and Research Institute of Texas. She added that using promotoras and peer educators is a good bridge between the healthcare system and the community.

> “They can broach the issue in a way that’s not threatening,” she said.

IHPR researchers Drs. Daisy Morales Campos and Cynthia Mojica are co-investigators on Entre Mujeres.

Promoting Healthier Lifestyles, Too

Another new project will team Dr. Parra-Medina with the YMCA of Greater San Antonio to promote Y Living, a lifestyle program for cancer prevention and risk reduction.

“For Y Living, we’ll use a community-based, family-focused approach and work with families to promote physical activity, a balanced diet and increased awareness of the impact of a healthy lifestyle on cancer risk reduction,” Dr. Parra-Medina said.

“We’ll provide health education, and use text messages enroll them in the program and motivate the entire family to be physically active and make healthy food choices.”

The project is funded by the Cancer Prevention and Research Institute of Texas.
Exito! Program Welcomes First Class of Latino Doctoral Hopefuls

As she wraps up her master’s degree at the University of South Florida, Mariana Arevalo already has worked on projects to improve health care access for the underserved. But that early experience is driving Arevalo to do more.

So Arevalo and 16 other master’s-level students or health professionals joined the Institute for Health Promotion Research’s first-ever Summer Institute of Exito! Latino Cancer Research Leadership Training on June 2-6, 2011, in San Antonio.

Exito! encourages participants to pursue a doctoral degree and careers studying how disease — especially cancer — affects Latinos differently.

“Exito! gave me the resources that I needed to pursue my goal — motivation and pathways,” Arevalo said. “I came in with doubts about my ability to have both. Now I’m confident that with hard work, passion and persistence I can achieve both things.”

Exito! (English: Success!), led by the IHPR and funded by the National Cancer Institute, recruits an annual cohort of master’s-level students or master’s-trained health professionals from Texas, Oklahoma, Arizona, New Mexico and other states.

Participants learn about cancer research and doctoral degree application during the first-ever Summer Institute of Exito! Latino Cancer Research Leadership Training on June 2-6, 2011, in San Antonio. Exito! is led by the Institute for Health Promotion Research.

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Participants take part in a five-day summer institute to provide motivation, skills and resources needed to apply for doctoral programs.

They can eventually apply for internships and doctoral retreats, too.

Continued on Page 9

2011 Exito! Summer Institute Graduates:

- Rebecca Adeigbe, San Antonio, Texas
- Rosalie Aguilar, San Antonio, Texas
- Mariana Arevalo, Tampa, Fla.
- Maria Priscilla Brietzke, Houston, Texas
- Marina C. Daldalian, Kansas City, Kan.
- Mary Vaneilys Diaz-Santana, Puerto Rico
- Martha Garcia, Brownsville, Texas
- David Irizarry Jr., McAllen, Texas
- Cristina Munoz-Masso, Puerto Rico
- Laura Reyes, San Antonio
- Diana L. Santiago, Puerto Rico
- Marievelisse Soto-Salgado, Puerto Rico
- Donaji Stelzig, Houston, Texas
- Loida Tamayo, Edinburg, Texas
- Edianys Velez, El Paso, Texas

Rena Pasick, UCSF
Paula Braveman, UCSF
Lloyd Potter, UTSA
Isabel Scarinci, UAB

“Vish” Viswanath, DFCI
Karen Emmons, DFCI
Timothy Rebeck, UPENN
Meredith Minkler, UCB

IHPR News Briefs

Videos: Watch All SALSI/CTRC Disparities Series Speakers

The San Antonio Life Sciences Institute (SALSI) and Cancer Therapy and Research Center (CTRC) Distinguished Health Disparities Lecture Series brought some of the top U.S. health disparities experts to San Antonio to offer the latest trends, tools and advancements in the fight against cancer health disparities.

The IHPR led the series with support from SALSI, CTRC and UTSA.

Click on each photo to watch a lecture.
San Antonio Cancer Survivors Help Test Which Exercise is Best

In response to rising obesity and breast cancer mortality rates, a new local study is testing how different types of exercise—like yoga—best improve cancer survivors’ fitness, quality of life and molecular indicators of future cancer risk.

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, 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.

“We expect comprehensive and yoga-focused participants to have better fitness outcomes, less stress and improved biological indicators of future risk of secondary cancers,” said study co-principal investigator Dr. Daniel Hughes of the IHPR. The study, funded by Susan G. Komen for the Cure, is led by IHPR Director Dr. Amelie Ramirez and features Cancer Therapy and Research Center translational scientists.

Each comprehensive exercise participant will be “prescribed” an exercise routine. They also will be encouraged to attend group exercise classes offered by the Deriving Inspiration & Vitality through Activity (DIVA) program from the Thrivewell Cancer Foundation, sponsored by the South Texas Accelerated Research Therapeutics (START) Center, which directs clinical trials of novel anticancer agents in San Antonio.

Yoga group participants will be asked to attend three yoga classes a week through classes led by Nydia Tijerina Darby of Nydia’s Yoga Therapy in San Antonio.

General participants will be encouraged to exercise in DIVA classes or other activities.

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.

The study team also is testing exercise’s impact on survivors at the molecular level. Researchers Drs. Rong Li, Sagar Ghosh, and Nicolas Musi will test how the different types of exercise impact participants’ levels of adipose stromal cells (ASCs). ASCs in blood have been increasingly recognized as an important source for a variety of cancer-promoting factors, including estrogens and cytokines. Other biomarkers to be studied include tumor necrosis factor (TNF), Interleukin 6 (IL-6), adiponectin and C-reactive protein. Dr. Hughes will also be looking at salivary cortisol, a known biomarker of stress.

“Our ultimate goal is to explore the utility of circulating ASCs as a biomarker for disease prognosis,” Dr. Li said, “and for measuring efficacy of approaches to increase survival and reduce disease recurrence.”

Clinics and/or physicians can e-mail Amanda Sintes to request IMPACT brochures or cards to hand to patients.

IHPR Unveils New Valley-based Exercise Lab

The Institute for Health Promotion Research (IHPR) has opened its Clinical Exercise Research and Teaching Center at its satellite office at The UT Health Science Center’s Regional Academic Health Center (RAHC) in the Lower Rio Grande Valley. The new center, the first of its kind in the region, will serve as an exercise rehabilitation facility and health promotion site for local residents, as well as a hub for research on obesity-related chronic diseases and teaching for medical and exercise science students. State-of-the-art exercise devices fill the center, including a metabolic cart, ECG machine, two treadmills, two cycles, strength-testing and flexibility equipment and more.

RAHC Dean Dr. Leo Vela, IHPR researcher Dr. Dan Hughes, IHPR Director Dr. Amelie Ramirez and others attended a ribbon-cutting at the center in Room 1.309 at the RAHC’s Clinical Research Unit in Harlingen June 28. Dr. Hughes will direct the new facility. IHPR research specialists Rose Annie Treviño and Gabriela Villanueva will staff the facility. The center has started enrolling study participants, and later will open to the public.
early 75% of Latinos were overweight or obese in Texas as of 2009.

That makes it vital to highlight programs and research that are contributing knowledge of what works best to encourage healthier lifestyles among Latinos.

To that end, the Institute for Health Promotion Research (IHPR) at The UT Health Science Center at San Antonio coordinated the 2nd Annual SALSI Research Forum: Latino Obesity on May 10, 2011, in San Antonio.

The forum showcased innovative strategies, programs and interventions from researchers and community leaders to reduce the Latino obesity epidemic in Texas.

Texas State Demographer Dr. Lloyd Potter discussed demographics of the state’s Latino population and trends on rising obesity. Chef Mark Erickson talked about how the Culinary Institute of America is bringing together chefs, researchers, physicians, food services, menu makers and more to identify ways to make food healthier.

UTHSCSA researchers included: Dr. Dan Hughes on IMPACT; Deborah Parra-Medina on BFF and NEST; Adelita Cantu on Muevete USA; and Dan Hale on South Texas.

UTSA researchers included: Drs. Zenong Yin on Míranos; Meizi He on healthy temples; Lesli Biediger-Friedman on ¡Por Vida!; and Gayle Nicoll on active design.

Community leaders included: Maggie Thompson on CPPW; Louis Lopez on Y Living; Peter Wald on early intervention; and Kate Rogers on H-E-B Health and Wellness.

The San Antonio Life Sciences Institute (SALSI) sponsored the forum.

See the full forum report here.

San Antonio Study to Use Camera/Computer Technology to Analyze Kids’ Diets

The Social and Health Research Center in San Antonio has received a $2 million grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture to use cameras and innovative computer software to estimate children’s dietary intake. The project would photograph kids’ meal trays before and after they ate. The computer system would analyze the photos to calculate exact calories eaten and values of more than 100 other nutrients. Parents will receive the data for their children, which researchers hope improves eating habits at home, according to Fox News Latino.

Texas News Tweets

- Laredo, Texas, a Predominantly Latino City, Ranked among Most Sedentary, Exercise-Phobic Areas in U.S. (Reuters)
- Summer Programs Teach S.A. Latino Kids about a Healthy Lifestyle (UTHSCSA)
- San Antonio Senior Citizens Joining Fight against Diabetes (KENS-TV)
- San Antonio Schools among 275 Honored as ‘Healthy’ (Alliance for a Healthier Generation)
- Report: Latinos Lag in College Completion (Texas Tribune)
Like Mother, Like Daughter: Susan and Christina Rodriguez Fight HIV/AIDS

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: David Krol

In June, Christina Rodriguez spoke at a United Nations press conference marking 30 years of the AIDS epidemic. The event was web-streamed live around the world.

Her opening words spoke volumes about her personal journey and advocacy:

“I am 20 years old,” Christina stated, “and I have not known a world without HIV.”

Christina’s mother, Susan Rodriguez, learned in 1995 that her husband was diagnosed with AIDS. After testing she found out she was also HIV-positive. All three of her children were then tested, and it turned out that Rodriguez’s middle child, Christina, had HIV through mother-to-child transmission. Christina’s father died a year and a half later of AIDS at a time when lifesaving HIV medications were just starting to become available.

Out of this multiple tragedy came SMART University (Sisterhood Mobilized for AIDS/HIV Research and Treatment), which Susan co-founded in 1998 because of the lack of good information for women about the disease. She thought the grassroots organization, based in the East Harlem community of New York City, might help make a difference in the fight against HIV/AIDS. A dozen years later, she still sees its impact from that perspective—as well as from other unexpected views.

SMART University provides treatment education for women living with HIV/AIDS so they may receive optimal treatment and care. In particular, it empowers them with tools and information they need to make informed health care decisions. It also helps them advocate for quality HIV care for themselves and their families.

Rodriguez has been widely praised for her work and advocacy. In 2010, she was recognized by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation as one of its Community Health Leaders. The honor recognizes individuals who have overcome daunting odds to improve the health and quality of life for vulnerable men, women and children in underserved communities across the U.S.

As Rodriguez received her award of recognition, her now-grown daughter looked on proudly. Both are healthy and continuing the fight of living with HIV.

“Because I have a great mom and because of the work she does, I learned about condoms and sex in a healthy and open environment,” Christina says.

She took that knowledge and in 2005 co-founded SMART Youth, a development and leadership program for young people living with or affected by HIV/AIDS. Through weekly meetings, the organization gives information and teaches skills in order to change the world one youth at a time.

Together, Susan and Christina Rodriguez have transformed their personal misfortune into successful initiatives to enable other families to stay healthy and prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS.

RWJF will begin accepting nominations for the 2012 Community Health Leaders awards in August 2011.

For more information, go here.

Other Conditions

U.S. Minorities No Strangers to Health Ills (HealthDay)

Latino Health Paradox: Latinos Boost Low Infant Mortality, Long Lives Despite Risk Factors (Huffington Post)

Black, Hispanic Kids More Likely to be Hospitalized for Severe Asthma Attacks (AHRQ)

Latino Teens at Higher Risk of Hearing Loss among Peers (Latina Lista)

Adding Folate to Tortilla Flour Might Cut Hispanic Birth Defects (HealthDay)

Clinical Trials Might Help Determine Why a Third of Latinas Say They Don’t Feel Well (L.A. Times)

Thalia’s Mothers Death Shines Light on Heart Disease among Latinas (Fox News Latino)

Study: Flavored Cigarettes Make it Harder for Black, Puerto Rican Smokers to Quit (HealthDay)

Hispanics Teens’ ‘Heavy Smoking’ Rate Jumps from 3.1% to 6.4% as Rate Declines among Teens Overall (thestatecolumn)

Hispanics, Blacks at Higher Risk of Strokes (Chicago Sun-Times)
Hispanic, Other Minority Youth Spend More Time ‘Plugged In’

Hispanics and other minorities ages 8-18 consume an average of 13 hours of media content a day, about 4-1/2 hours more than their white counterparts, according to a Northwestern University report, the first national study to focus exclusively on children’s media use by race and ethnicity.

Findings include:

Minority youth spend about an hour and a half more each day than white youth using their cell phones, iPods, etc., to watch TV and videos, play games, and listen to music (3:07 for Asian youth, 2:53 for Hispanics, 2:52 for blacks, and 1:20 for whites).

Black and Hispanic youth consume an average of more than three hours of live TV daily (3:23 for black youth, 3:08 for Hispanics, 2:28 for Asians and 2:14 for whites).

TV viewing rates are even higher when data on time-shifting technologies such as TiVo, DVDs, and mobile and online viewing are included (5:54 for black youth, 5:21 for Hispanics, 4:41 for Asians, and 3:36 for whites).

Black and Hispanic youth are more likely to have TV sets in their bedrooms (84% of blacks, 77% of Hispanics, 64% of whites and Asians). About 78% of black and 67% of Hispanic youth eat more meals in front of the TV set, compared to 58% of whites and 55% of Asians.

“In the past decade, the gap between minority and white youth’s daily media use has doubled for blacks and quadrupled for Hispanics,” says Northwestern Professor Ellen Wartella, who directed the study and heads the Center on Media and Human Development in the School of Communication. “The big question is what these disparities mean for our children’s health and education.

“Our study is not meant to blame parents,” says Wartella, a longtime Sesame Workshop trustee. “We hope to help parents, educators and policymakers better understand how children’s media use may influence health and educational disparities.”

Latino News Tweets

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

Healthy Lifestyles

‘F as in Fat’ Report: Latinos among the Fattest Americans (Report)

Hispanic, Black Students Lack Exercise (Nurse.com)

1 in 4 Teens Drink Soda Daily; Differences by Race/Ethnicity (ABC News)

Vigorous Exercise May Help Prevent ‘Silent’ Strokes, Says Study with Mostly Hispanics (Health.com)

Soluble Fiber Appears Key to Trimming ‘Bad Fat’ (HealthDay News)

Only Half of Obese Mexican-American Adults Receive Diet, Exercise Advice from Physicians (News-Medical.net)

Care Issues

Survey: Latinas Say ‘Service Providers Not Understanding Their Culture’ is a Barrier to Health Care Access (Report)

New AHRQ Data: 47% of Adult Hispanics Reported Not Having Seen a Doctor in 2008 (RWJF Blog)

Most Hispanics Don’t Get Preventive Health Services (Report)

Cultural Sensitivity Is Key to Quality Care (HealthCanal)

Speaking Same Language Means Better Health Care Quality (Pew Hispanic Center)

Low Health Literacy Linked to Higher Risk of Death (Report)

Study: Latino Men Want Specific, Accessible Health Info (Journal Article)

Latinos Are 68% More Likely than Whites to Spend No Money on Healthcare (UPI)

Demographics

The Mexican-American Boom: Births Overtake Immigration (Pew Hispanic Center)

More Puerto Rican-origin Hispanics in U.S. than Hispanics in Puerto Rico (Report)

Wealth Gaps Rise to Record Highs between Whites, Blacks and Hispanics (Report)
Continued from Page 4

The hope is that participants go on to earn doctoral degrees and conduct novel research on why Latinos suffer worse outcomes from cancer and chronic disease.

“We believe training new Latino researchers will increase the number of Latinos in cancer control research, which will increase work being done to reduce Latino cancer,” said Dr. Amelie Ramirez, director of Exito! and the IHPR.

At the recent first Exito! Summer Institute, 17 recruits heard from Latino role models and researchers, such as Dr. Cristina Barroso of the UT School of Public Health and Jose Pagan of the University of North Texas Health Science Center.

Participants also learned about cancer, research, culture and career options.

Several said the program provided strong motivation to apply for a doctoral degree.

“I have no one to talk with about the application process. Being a first-generation college graduate and master’s level graduate, I can’t get insight/guidance from family,” said Laura Ruhalcaca of Alexandria, Va. “It’s been inspiring to see people just like me overcome barriers and become successful in their fields.”

Learn more about Exito! and get details on the next Summer Institute here.