Latina Cancer Survivor Makes a Career of Helping Others with Cancer

A wave of shock swept over Olga Cardona as she listened to her doctor.

“You have breast cancer.”

Cardona knew nothing about cancer. She thought it was a death sentence. She was scared. She worried more when her insurance wouldn’t cover all chemotherapy.

How could this be happening to me?

A patient navigator calmed her fears.

The navigator, a trained community health worker, taught Cardona what cancer is, got her in a breast cancer support group, and led her to resources to cover her treatment.

Cardona, years later, now is in remission—and she became a promotora to promote health at the San Ysidro Health Center in California, where she was first diagnosed.

“I wanted to pay it forward because I felt so grateful to everyone that had helped me through my battle,” Cardona said. “There are many other women like me, and they deserve to know that they can survive cancer, too.”

Cardona works with patients, provides education through focus groups and interviews, and implements study-based breast cancer risk reduction and nutrition curricula.

Cardona’s work is supported by the Institute for Health Promotion Research (IHPR) at the UT Health Science Center at San Antonio, as part of its Redes En Acción project (via the National Cancer Institute) and studies funded by Susan G. Komen for the Cure.

Continued on Page 6
Good news is happening in the obesity fight: Rates have fallen among low-income kids in several states, rates have plateaued among girls, and targeted efforts in some states have reduced childhood obesity rates.

Yet major problems remain.

Obesity-related diseases continue to cause substantial costs and human suffering, while disparities in obesity rates are widening among Latinos and other groups.

With such a big need for solutions, a new report highlights some of the most innovative programs to prevent and treat obesity.


The roundtable formed to engage leadership from multiple sectors—public health, health care, government, the food industry, education, philanthropy, the nonprofit sector, and academia—to address the obesity crisis.

I am among the members of this group, as a representative of the *Institute for Health Promotion Research* at the UT Health Science Center at San Antonio and *Salud America*, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation-funded research network on Latino childhood obesity.

I hope you will read the report and learn more about the fight against obesity.

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

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**IHPR Intern Profile:**  
**Aspiring Physician Works to Improve Latina Health: Jennifer Garcia-Davalos**

Laredo native Jennifer Garcia-Davalos grew up on the Texas-Mexico border, where the mostly Latino population suffers high rates of obesity, diabetes, and certain cancers.

She has always wanted to help reduce those disparities.

That’s why Garcia-Davalos, an aspiring physician and a master’s-degree student in public health at The UT School of Public Health, interned at the Institute for Health Promotion Research (IHPR) at the UT Health Science Center at San Antonio.

Over the past year, she helped the IHPR conduct research, mobilize community outreach, and inform, educate, and empower health in Latino communities.

“My internship at the IHPR gave me tools needed to succeed in my graduate studies and my future plans in the health and medical fields,” Garcia-Davalos said. “As a future physician, I want to engage in public health initiatives so that I may effectively work with other professionals to enhance the quality of life of our communities.”

At the IHPR, Garcia-Davalos was instrumental in helping develop the Breast Friends Forever (BFF) support group for young women with breast cancer.

She participated in monthly BFF group meetings, compiled members’ stories, developed a manual of group operations, gave out educational information, and used social media to stimulate communication among group members.

“I learned that the simple act of support and kindness can make all the difference in a survivor’s fight against breast cancer,” she said.

Garcia-Davalos now is taking her IHPR experience with her to the Ross University School of Medicine.

She will study primary care medicine.

Sandra San Miguel, a research instructor at the IHPR and Garcia Davalos’ mentor, said she will make a “great physician.”

― Sandra San Miguel

**Fun Facts**

**Hometown:** Laredo, Texas  
**Family:** Parents; three brothers; two sisters; eight nieces and nephews  
**Hobbies:** Working out, Pilates, kickboxing, weight training, running  
**Favorite food(s):** Mexican  
**Favorite movie(s):** “All the Disney animated classics”  
**Favorite book(s):** *The Four Agreements* by Don Miguel Ruiz

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Garcia-Davalos now is taking her IHPR experience with her to the Ross University School of Medicine.

She will study primary care medicine. Sandra San Miguel, a research instructor at the IHPR and Garcia Davalos’ mentor, said she will make a “great physician.”

“It’s a privilege to mentor young students like Jennifer, expose them to public health and the positive impact that they too can have on our Latino population,” San Miguel said.
Study: Latinos in South Texas Have Nation’s Highest Rates of Liver Cancer

Latinos in South Texas have the highest rate of liver cancer in the nation—a rate that continues to rise higher, according to a new study by researchers at the Institute for Health Promotion Research (IHPR) at the UT Health Science Center at San Antonio.

The study, published in the scientific journal *PLoS ONE*, compared the newest state and federal data to pinpoint current liver cancer rates and trends.

They found that Texas Latino male and female incidence rates were 3.1 and 4 times higher than their non-Latino White counterparts, and South Texas Latinos had even higher rates.

On top of that, liver cancer incidence rates are rising across all groups.

“This clearly shows that liver cancer is not only already higher among Latinos in South Texas, but it’s rising, too. We need solutions,” said Dr. Amelie G. Ramirez, the study’s lead author, director of the IHPR, and associate director for cancer prevention and health disparities at the Cancer Therapy and Research Center at the Health Science Center.

The cause of elevated, rising liver cancer rates among Latinos is largely unknown.

Risk factors may include: hepatitis, diabetes; obesity; genetic predisposition; and environmental contamination and hazards along the Texas-Mexico border.

Dr. Ramirez’ team will continue examining the causes and potential solutions.

“Understanding the causes of increasing liver cancer in South Texas is critical not only for developing interventions and identifying high-risk individuals so that they may be screened and treated with the best available care,” Ramirez said.

Others from IHPR faculty and staff involved in the study were: Alan E.C. Holden, Edgar Munoz, and Rebecca Adeigbe.

### IHPR Research Materials

**Publications**


**Presentations**

IHPR Researcher to Create New Tool to Persuade Latino Men to Get Screened for Colorectal Cancer

Latinos are less likely than non-Latino whites to get screened for colorectal cancer, and are more likely to be diagnosed at harder-to-treat stages.

Latino men, specifically, have a 17% lower screening rate than non-Latino men.

That’s why Dr. Cynthia Mojica, a researcher at the Institute for Health Promotion Research at the UT Health Science Center at San Antonio, is creating a cultural- and language-relevant print-based tool to persuade Latino men to get colorectal cancer screening.

Mojica’s efforts are fueled by a new grant from the Health Science Center’s Mentored Research Career Development (KL2) Program in Clinical and Translational Science.

“The grant award will give me training, mentorship and research support to help me bring the community into the research process to help create a tool that can change their behavior and lead them to get screened,” Mojica said.

As part of the award, Mojica will go through training workshops, coursework, professional and programmatic activities, and conferences.

Cynthia Mojica

She’ll also have assistance from an experienced mentorship team:
• Dr. Deborah Parra-Medina, a professor at the IHPR at the Health Science Center;
• Dr. Amelie G. Ramirez, professor and director of the IHPR at the Health Science Center;
• Dr. Sally Vernon, professor of behavioral sciences and epidemiology at The University of Texas-Houston School of Public Health; and
• Dr. Barbara Turner, professor of medicine at the Health Science Center; and
• Dr. Janna Lesser, associate professor of nursing at the Health Science Center.

For her research, Mojica will: identify and evaluate existing health-decision tools on colorectal cancer screening, such as brochures; convene an expert panel to review the best elements of existing tools; convene focus groups to determine how to tailor a tool for Latino men; and create a new tool that melds the best existing tool elements with cultural and linguistic tailoring to increase Latino men’s screening behaviors.

She will then submit for a larger-scale grant to try out the new tool.

“If successful, this new tool will provide a culturally relevant, language-appropriate tool to convince more Latino men to get screened for colorectal cancer,” Mojica said. “Colorectal cancer screening is clearly not a priority for many men, but it can save lives.”

Breast cancer survivors sought for study with a cancer-fighting food plan

Breast cancer survivors can now join a new study to learn how certain foods may reduce the risk of cancer recurrence. The study, Rx for Better Breast Health, is funded by Susan G. Komen for the Cure and led by Dr. Amelie Ramirez, professor and director of the Institute for Health Promotion Research (IHPR) at the UT Health Science Center at San Antonio. Breast cancer survivors who participate will be randomly assigned to one of two groups. Each group will get different cancer nutrition tools, possibly six cooking demonstrations by Chef Iverson Brownell, who creates innovative culinary recipes that taste great and promote health. To join the study, breast cancer survivors must be ages 18-75 and meet additional criteria. Three gift cards will be given to participants who complete the study’s three assessments—including surveys, blood work, and other measurements—at the CTRC. Call 210-562-6579 to see if you qualify. Go here for more information or watch a news report about the study by WOAI-TV.

IHPR Wins Web Health Awards

The IHPR recently won four Web Health Awards: a “silver” award in infographics for Sugary Drinks & Latino Kids; a “bronze” award in websites for its Salud America! Growing Healthy Change online platform on Latino childhood obesity; and two “merit” awards in social media for its SaludToday Twitter and YouTube pages.
**Èxito! Program Helps Latinos Seek Doctoral Degrees, Research Careers**

Èxito! Grad: Starla Garcia  
Houston, Texas

Long-distance racing takes stamina and perseverance.

Starla Garcia exuded these skills as a collegiate cross-country athlete—skills she learned from her father, who shelved his own dreams of a doctoral degree to take care of his family.

Garcia is now employing perseverance to help underserved populations outrace the health problems they face in places like the colonias along the Texas-Mexico border, where she grew up.

Garcia has been able to use her experiences and understanding of the Latino culture in the work she does as a member of the Hispanic Health Coalition in Houston, Texas. She also is pursuing a master's degree in health education at the University of Houston.

She applied for the Èxito! Latino Cancer Research Leadership Training program—which offers a five-day summer institute and internships to encourage master's-level students and health professionals to pursue a doctoral degree and a cancer research career—to get information and advice on becoming a competitive candidate for a doctoral program.

After attending, Garcia said she now feels she has increased confidence to pursue a doctoral degree. And the experience added to her sense of belonging to the Latino culture.

“Being part of Èxito! has helped me realize how strong and connected Latino communities can be. I have learned how much we are able to pull together through hardships and help one another overcome challenges,” Garcia said. “The relationships formed during the Èxito! Summer Institute have expanded my vision of what others need in their Latino communities. Through respect, trust, and understanding my Èxito! friendships have also solidified my future personal goals to become an individual that is dedicated to the well-being of my Hispanic culture.”

Èxito! Grad: Vanessa Torres  
Riverside, Calif.

Vanessa Torres, strengthened by her faith and encouraged by her parents whose roots are from Jalisco, Mexico, symbolizes the iconic Mexican song, *Jalisco No Te Rajes* (English: Jalisco Don't Give Up).

She understood and overcame the many economic and other barriers Latinos face and became a first-generation college graduate, earning a bachelor's of science degree in environmental economics & policy and Spanish literature from the University of California, Berkeley.

But she isn't stopping there.

Currently a master's-degree student in health promotion and behavioral science at San Diego State University, Torres is dedicated to helping Latinos and works on projects promoting physical activity, walkability, and access to healthy foods.

In considering ways to do even more, Torres thought about additional education.

To gain skills to overcome any barriers to future education, Torres sought direction from the Èxito! Latino Cancer Research Leadership Training program, which offers a five-day summer institute and internships to encourage master's-level students and health professionals to pursue a doctoral degree and a cancer research career.

Through the information and networks gained by attending the Èxito! Summer Institute, Torres gained resources to bolster her never-give-up attitude: *Adelante, no te rajes* (English: Onward, don't give up).
Hispanics are the fastest-growing U.S. demographic group, and they suffer from major health disparities, including higher rates of cancers of the cervix, stomach and liver.

But their enrollment in cancer clinical trials seeking to cure these problems is abysmally low: 3.9 percent.

Three physicians from The UT Health Science Center at San Antonio have issued a “call to arms” to other cancer researchers to improve their recruitment of Hispanic patients into clinical trials, according to a paper published recently in the “Comments and Controversies” section of the Journal of Clinical Oncology.

“Fundamentally, in the most recent published cancer clinical trials, either the number and proportion of Hispanics are not reported or are far below their actual representation in the national population,” said Dr. Ian M. Thompson Jr., director of the Health Science Center’s Cancer Therapy & Research Center. Thompson is one of the authors, along with Dr. Anand Karnad, CTRC chief of the division of hematology/oncology, and Dr. Alberto Parra, internal medicine resident at the UT Health Science Center.

“We have a major responsibility to ensure adequate representation,” Dr. Thompson said. “How else will we know how best to treat our patients, and how else are we going to reduce the health disparities in this population?”

About 58 percent of San Antonio residents are Hispanic, with 68 percent in the South Texas region as a whole. As the National Cancer Institute-designated cancer center serving South Texas, the CTRC has a strategic focus on improving health care in the region by working to increase Hispanic participation in cancer clinical trials.

In 2012, 45 percent of the 822 patients enrolled onto the clinical trials offered at CTRC were Hispanic.

The CTRC achieved this by studying ways to reduce barriers that might be unique to Hispanic patients, developing a minority recruitment toolbox with bilingual forms, and creating a coordinator of minority programs who is bilingual.

“For institutions like ours that serve a ‘minority-majority’ population, it’s a major responsibility for us to ensure adequate representation so that we can tell our patients how they can best be treated and how we can reduce the disparities of this rapidly-growing population,” Dr. Thompson said.

Cardona knows that many border-area Latinas avoid the clinic.

Women here don’t ask for resources, don’t come in for screenings or exams, and if they feel sick, they cross the border for medical help, she said.

“This is when promotoras’ work becomes valuable to educate people about resources and meet their needs,” Cardona said.

Cardona has helped many women through her work at the clinic, said Sandra San Miguel de Majors, a researcher at the IHPR and Redes En Acción.

“Olga is just what a promotora should be—passionate and dedicated to making a huge difference in the lives of clinic patients,” San Miguel said.

Cardona is just happy to help Latinas the same way her promotora helped her.

“When I run into people that I provided information to at community events or that participated in my classes, they tell me that they are making changes to improve their health and are now attending regular doctor visits that also include their family,” Cardona said. “This makes me feel like I am doing things right and continues to give me the motivation to do what I do.”

Latina Cancer Survivor Makes Career Helping Others with Cancer

Continued from Page 1

“My role is to educate people about breast cancer, early detection, risk factors, resources, etc.,” she said. “But most importantly, to teach that cancer is not a death sentence. Help is available.”

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Texas News Tweets

Texas’ Culture Wars Have Created a Public Health Disaster for Women

Study: Latinos in Texas Eager to Get Health Care

Hunger on the Border: Latino Elders Struggle to Eat in South Texas

Study: Minority Women make up 55% of Texas women; Latinas Face Challenges

UTSA Launches Latino-Focused Demography Summer Program
Food Trucks: Healthy or Junk Food for Latinos?

Food trucks can bring fresh produce to the doorstep of Latino homes.

Or junk food and bacon-wrapped hotdogs.

For example, more than 600 food trucks bring both fruits/veggies and/or sugary snacks (along with other household items) to Latino neighborhoods in Los Angeles and Orange County, Calif., creating “threads of community life and ethnic commerce that bind immigrants to the customs of their homelands,” the L.A. Times reports.

Increasingly, cities and programs are using food trucks to provide a source of fresh produce and healthy food in food deserts, which lack access to such options and are more prevalent in Latino and black communities than elsewhere.

These efforts are cropping up across the nation.

Local food advocates turned old buses into mobile farmers’ markets and fresh produce delivery vehicles in Washington, D.C., Lima, Ohio, and Rowan County, N.C.

A truck-pulled trailer brings milk, eggs, and fruits/veggies weekly into an area of Tulsa, Okla., with a growing Latino population. The trailer boasts that it sells no chips, candy or soda.

In Sarasota County, Fla., a food bank bought a food truck to bring fruits/veggies to the needy.

A mobile test kitchen plans cooking demos and healthy meals in the East End of Richmond, Va., which is home to several government-run housing projects.

Some initiatives even bus people to the grocery store and out of food deserts in Baltimore and Rock Island, Ill.

Learn more how you can create healthier food in your neighborhoods at the Salud America! Growing Healthy Change website.

Latino News Tweets

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

Cancer

► Study: E-cigs Heavily Marketed on Twitter, May Lure Non-Smoking Latinos to Smoke
► Study: Latinos, Blacks More Likely to Have Cancer-related Pain
► Study: Most Hispanic Men Don’t Trust HPV Vaccine
► Mail/Phone/Text Intervention Improved Colorectal Cancer Screening in Latinos

Other Conditions

► CDC Report: Black, Hispanic Adults Are Twice as Likely to Have Diabetes
► Whooping Cough: Silly Name, Deadly Disease, Especially for Latinos
► Study of Hispanics: Sleep Apnea May Increase Risk of Hearing Loss
► Study of Hispanics: Migraines May Affect Stroke Risk
► Study: Higher Risk for Depression, Smoking among Acculturated Latinos
Despite slow improvements in the quality of care overall, access is worsening and health care disparities, particularly for minorities and groups with lower socioeconomic status, have seen little to no improvement, according to a new report.

The report, the 11th annual National Healthcare Disparities Report, is conducted annually by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ), found that, compared with whites, racial/ethnic minorities receive worse care across 25-40% of quality measures.

Poor and low-income people receive worse care than individuals with high income for about 60% of quality measures.

These disparities are even more pronounced for measures of health care access, and among particular racial/ethnic groups.

Hispanics had worse access to care than Whites for about 60% of measures. Blacks and Hispanics received worse care than Whites for about 40% of quality measures.

The report concludes:

“‘To remain competitive, our nation needs to improve access to care, reduce disparities, and accelerate the pace of quality improvement, especially in the areas of preventive care and chronic disease management.’”

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**Latino News Tweets**

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

- Search #GrowingHealthyChange on Twitter to See Healthy Changes
- Study: Hispanic Newborns More Likely than Whites to be Seen in ER
- Report: Latino Jobs Growth Now Driven by U.S. Born, Not Immigrants
- Report: Hispanic Consumers Love Their Mobile Technology
- Study: Hispanic, Asian Immigrant Parents Less Likely to Read to Their Kids
- Researchers: Mexican Genetics Can Vary Drastically

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Demographics

- Report: Latino Jobs Growth Now Driven by U.S. Born, Not Immigrants
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How to Reduce the Risk of Summer Heat-Related Illness in Outdoor Workers

Summer is here.
And that means increased risk of heat-related illness for outdoor workers.

Labor-intensive activities in hot weather can raise body temperatures beyond the level that normally can be cooled by sweating. Heat illness initially may manifest as heat rash or heat cramps, but can quickly escalate to heat exhaustion and then heat stroke if simple preventative measures are not followed.

Heat illness disproportionately affects those who have not built up a tolerance to heat (acclimatization), and it is especially dangerous for new and temporary workers.

In 2012, there were 31 heat-related worker deaths and 4,120 illnesses.

Workers at particular risk are those in outdoor industries, such as agriculture, construction, landscaping and transportation.

“Heat-related illnesses can be fatal, and employers are responsible for keeping workers safe,” said U.S. Secretary of Labor Thomas E. Perez. “Employers can take a few easy steps to save lives, including scheduling frequent water breaks, providing shade and allowing ample time to rest.”

The U.S. Department of Labor’s Occupational Safety and Health Administration, which runs an annual campaign to prevent heat illness, offers a bilingual mobile app to enable monitoring of the heat index at work sites.

They also have a variety of Spanish and English educational materials.

New Toolkit to Help Reach Latinas with Culturally Relevant Breast Cancer Info

A new online toolkit aims to help community organizations across the nation deliver culturally and language-appropriate breast cancer information to Latinas.

The toolkit, developed by Susan G. Komen for the Cure and the Mexican Embassy, offers free resources to both experienced and novice breast cancer educators working in the Latina community, providing culturally-specific communication resources including tips, sample talking points, breast cancer statistics, methods to address barriers to care as well as overview videos in English and Spanish.

“It’s essential that women are knowledgeable about this disease so that they will be empowered to take action to potentially reduce their risk of breast cancer, to approach their health care provider if they notice a change in their breast, or to simply ask questions,” said Komen President and CEO Dr. Judy Salerno, in a statement.

Breast cancer is the most commonly diagnosed cancer in U.S. Latinas.

Compared to non-Hispanic white women, Hispanic/Latina women are more likely to be diagnosed with more advanced, larger and/or more difficult-to-treat breast cancer tumors.

This difference has been largely attributed to longer intervals between mammograms as well as the lack of timely follow-up of an abnormal mammogram.

Go here to access the toolkit (registration required to access certain portions).

Funding

Grant Roundup
The following organizations listed at right 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

Ongoing Events

CancerCare Workshops
CancerCare, in partnership with Redes En Acción, which is led by the Institute for Health Promotion Research (IHPR) at The UT Health Science Center at San Antonio, will offer free workshops on a variety of issues. Register here.

Latino Resource Briefs

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Latino Resource Briefs

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CPRIT
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.

Editor: Cliff Despres
Design: Jeffrey Heinke Design

The Institute for Health Promotion Research (IHPR) is part of the Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics in the School of Medicine at The University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio. The IHPR is supported in part by the Health Science Center and its Cancer Therapy & Research Center and Regional Academic Health Center. The IHPR investigates the causes and solutions to the unequal impact of cancer and other chronic diseases among the populations of South Texas, Texas, and the nation.