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National Steering Committee helps shape future activities



Dr. Ken Chu of the National Cancer Institute, left, answers questions during a session, as steering committee members Venus Gines, center, and Diana Vaca listen.

More than 50 participants in the 2nd Annual *Redes En Acción* National Steering Committee Meeting engaged in two days of lively discussion and debate, heard several perspectives from keynote speakers and panelists, and worked together to move the *Redes* Latino cancer research, training and awareness agenda forward.

"At our first steering committee meeting, we initiated the process of prioritizing the many cancer issues that impact the Latino population, with those priorities serving as a guide for future *Redes* activities," said Amelie G. Ramirez, DrPH, Principal Investigator. "For this year's meeting we wanted to both articulate what we've accomplished already through *Redes En*

Acción and fine-tune the plans and guidelines for what we hope to achieve in the future.

"At the same time we felt it was important to hear a number of different viewpoints of our Latino cancer research, training and awareness mission from leading authorities in universities, community organizations and the government."

Television, newspaper and radio media all were on hand to cover the meeting, which took place at the Plaza Hotel in downtown San Antonio.

A highlight of the meeting was the unveiling of a nationwide mass media campaign to promote Latino participation in cancer clinical trials. At a special preview dinner, hosted by the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation, meeting participants and invited guests watched the new series of television PSAs (public service announcements), which were produced by *Redes En Acción* in English and Spanish.

For the second year in a row, U.S. Congressman *Ciro D. Rodriguez*, Honorary Chair of *Redes En Acción*, set the tone for the two-day meeting with a motivational message for those engaged in cancer prevention and control among Latinos.

He acknowledged some progress in this battle, due in large measure to the activities of organizations such as *Redes En Acción*, but emphasized that much still needs to be accomplished.

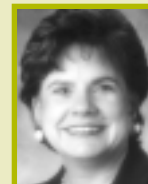
"Hispanics lag behind in almost every aspect of health care," the Congressman told

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Isabel Scarinci, PhD, the recipient of the inaugural *Redes En Acción* junior faculty career development award, greets Congressman *Ciro D. Rodriguez*. To honor the Congressman's record of commitment to Latino health and education, the award was named the *Ciro D. Rodriguez Cancer Career Development Award*. Dr. Scarinci is working with the *Redes* National Network Center in San Antonio for three months developing guidelines to assist Latinos who aspire to careers as cancer researchers.

Inside



For the second year in a row, experts in health and cancer from across the nation gathered in San Antonio to take part in work sessions relating to Latino cancer issues. This

was our 2nd Annual *Redes En Acción* National Steering Committee Meeting, and it was packed with opportunities for debate, discourse, socializing and, of course, networking. It's our lead story in this issue.

Don't miss the photo of U.S. Congressman *Ciro Rodriguez* with our junior faculty fellow Dr. *Isabel Scarinci*. As noted in the photo caption, we named our *Ciro D. Rodriguez Cancer Career Development Award* in the Congressman's honor. He has served as the *Redes En Acción* Honorary Chair since the inception of the initiative, and he's been a champion of Latinos all his life. It is indeed an honor for *Redes* to have a friend like Congressman *Rodriguez*.

At the steering committee meeting, we also unveiled the new *Redes En Acción* national media campaign and gave our audience a sneak preview of the bilingual television PSAs we're distributing to both English and Spanish TV stations around the country. The PSAs address the significant issue of Latino participation in cancer clinical trials. For a closer look at the campaign, which also includes radio and print PSAs, see our story on page 5.

In another unveiling of sorts, at the meeting we also presented preliminary results of a nationwide survey of key observers who were asked to prioritize cancer issues of concern to Latinos. For more information about this survey, see the sidebar on page 4.

Of course, we have much more inside this issue, including news about the upcoming *Redes* pilot research project funding cycle and a story on a unique program in San Antonio that places 4th-year medical students in the community as "ambassadors" to raise Latino awareness about cancer.

Amelie G. Ramirez, DrPH
Principal Investigator
Redes En Acción



RESEARCH

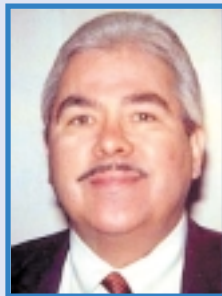
Skin Cancer in Latinos

Dr. R. Steven Padilla
Albuquerque, New Mexico

In his work over the years, R. Steven Padilla, MD, has been able to practice his passions, academic medicine and research. The two “go hand in hand – asking questions and being able to find the answers, whether they are basic science questions or clinical questions,” he says. “Just the sense of curiosity was what led me to have an interest in research.”

Dr. Padilla is the Chairman of the Department of Dermatology at the University of New Mexico, the Associate Dean for Practice Management and Chief of the Dermatology Surgery and Oncology Cancer Center.

Much of his research has focused on skin cancer in the Latino population. One study, seeking to determine if Latinos exhibit a different morphologic appearance of skin cancer, found a higher



incidence of pigmented basal cell carcinoma in Latinos. “The major contributing factor was the high density of melanin pigment within the tumors,” Dr. Padilla observed.

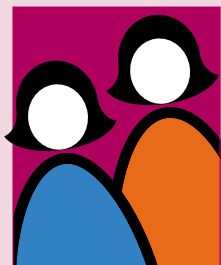
He is currently involved in several studies. In one, he is using microarray analytic technique to look at the gene expression in skin tumors. The study’s purpose is to understand the biology of the malignant melanoma and develop potential new therapeutic interventions.

Dr. Padilla received most of his training in his home state of New Mexico. He began his research endeavors at the University of New Mexico, where he obtained his medical degree, his dermatology residency training and later his masters degree in business administration. He received additional training in dermatopathology at the University of Minnesota Medical School and later dermatologic surgery and oncology training at the Cleveland Clinic in Cleveland, Ohio.

During his early career, Dr. Padilla did not have a formal mentor but worked with individuals who were willing to take the time to guide him. Today, mentoring is very important to him; he encourages junior faculty and medical students to become involved in research.

“I get involved in helping students with their specific research projects,” he says. “I guide them and show them the various differences in the population and give them the opportunity to study the Hispanic population.

“Inquiring is a lifelong part of medicine. It translates into research, whether it is clinical or basic science, and complements being in medicine. I hope the experience in itself can keep students interested in doing research.”



TRAINING

A Personal Commitment

Olga Cotera Perez-Perez
Miami, Florida

How Latinos deal with cancer diagnosis is of particular – and personal – interest to Olga Cotera Perez-Perez. She is not only in a managerial and nurse training position with a major hospital home care program, she is also a cancer survivor.

“I am committed to training and educating Hispanics on understanding the etiology of being a cancer patient,” she says. “I have noticed that a cancer diagnosis is taboo within the Hispanic culture and many families remain in denial long after diagnosis.”

Olga, who has BSN and MA degrees, serves as Director of Clinical Service, Division of Public Health Trust Home Care at the Jackson Memorial Hospital and is a member of the *Redes En Acción* Southeast Regional Network Center Advisory Committee. In addition, she is actively involved with CancerLink, a group that raises money for breast cancer research.

“With the rise of managed-care systems and insurance costs, I have noticed a sharp increase in acute Hispanic patients in our community,” she observed. “What is more alarming is that larger numbers of younger diagnosed patients are being admitted.”

Olga, a breast cancer survivor of four years, now looks upon her diagnosis with the disease as a “blessing in disguise,” because of the new perspective it’s given her. “I have a renewed appreciation for each and every day of life, and I never take anything for granted.”

That perspective also includes a deeper understanding of Latino attitudes toward cancer, an understanding that she uses in educating and training her staff of nurses, as well as patients and the public. “Hispanics have a great fear of cancer, which is mainly due to a lack of understanding and education,” she notes.

She stresses that “a cancer diagnosis is not a death sentence. Our staff and nurses need to be trained to promote awareness and the Hispanic community needs to be educated and taught that early detection is the key to survival.”





AWARENESS

Bridging the Gap

Milagros Valdivia
New York City, New York

The “digital divide,” the gap that separates people with access to computer technology and information available through the World Wide Web from those who lack access, is a special problem in health care. Ethnic minorities, people with less formal education, and low-income individuals not only lack access to computers and virtual information, but also suffer from health disparities.

Milagros Valdivia, Digital Divide Coordinator for the Cancer Information Service (CIS) of New York, is working to educate residents and health professionals in Harlem on ways to utilize credible online information and resources to learn more about cancer prevention, screening and treatment.

In September 2000, the New York region of the CIS, a *Redes En Acción* partner, received an award from the National Cancer Institute to implement *Bridging the Digital Divide Project: Your Access to Cancer Information*. The workshops, available in English and Spanish, are conducted on a web-based training site through a diverse group of Harlem community-based organizations who offer

Internet access to residents.

The Harlem community is primarily comprised of Latinos and African-Americans. These populations tend to inadequately use cancer-screening services, and this leads to later diagnosis and poorer survival outcomes when compared to Whites.

“My hope is that community members will gain the knowledge to adapt healthier behaviors, such as going for routine screening and eating better,” says Milagros. “People can empower themselves to change their lifestyles.”

Milagros has encountered barriers. “While those who have attended the workshops have given positive feedback, it has been challenging to recruit participants – especially Hispanics,” she notes.

Efforts to increase workshop participation by Latinos include placement of Spanish-language announcements for the workshops in phone bill statements and a live interview with Malin Falú, a Spanish radio commentator on Radio WADO 1280.

“My experience with the digital divide project has been very challenging, but at the same time it has been tremendously rewarding,” says Milagros. “It gives me great satisfaction to help even one or two people.

“For others who are hoping to engage in cancer awareness efforts, don’t get discouraged and give up. Know that your efforts are making a difference.”



CIS turns 25

For the past 25 years, the Cancer Information Service (CIS) has provided the latest, most accurate information about cancer to patients, their families and the public. The CIS equips people with the reliable, science-based information they need to become active participants in their own health care – from prevention, to early detection, to treatment and survivorship.

The health agency, which is a *Redes En Acción* partner, is marking its milestone silver anniversary with the theme *Celebrating Our Spirit of Caring and Commitment*.

The CIS serves cancer patients and their families, the public, and health professionals through 14 regional offices located throughout the United States, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Through its toll-free information service (1-800-4-CANCER), the agency has helped nearly nine million callers since its inception in 1976. Calls are answered in English and Spanish, and

from the deaf and hard-of-hearing through TTY (1-800-332-8615).

This year the CIS also began helping people by providing one-on-one assistance through *LiveHelp* on various NCI web sites, such as CancerNet (www.cancer.net) and CancerTrials (www.cancertrials.gov). *LiveHelp* allows Internet users to

communicate with information specialists using chat technology.

Another service, the CIS Partnership Program, established in 1990, collaborates with other cancer and health-related organizations to develop appropriate education programs that reach out to minority and medically underserved groups in need of cancer information. Located in 38 offices across the country, staff members help organizations plan and implement effective programs.

Most recently, the CIS has instituted a Research Initiative to study ways to improve delivery of cancer information to patients, family members and the public. With its direct link to thousands of callers, the CIS is an ideal health communications research laboratory. CIS regional offices participate in studies on how to effectively communicate with people about healthy behaviors, health risks, and ways to prevent, diagnose and treat cancer.



A SURGEON'S PERSPECTIVE

Dr. Eddie Ramirez
Los Alamitos, California

The surgeon's role with cancer patients and their families is familiar to Eddie Ramirez, MD. When he talks to young people who are considering a career in the operating room, he speaks from experience.

"You need to think about how your skills can help make your patients feel better," he says. "For cancer patients, especially, you have to recognize that many of them can live longer after a needed procedure, quality care and close follow-up."

Since his 1986 graduation from medical school at the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA), Dr. Ramirez's journey in medicine has been a long one – literally. Deciding to specialize in otolaryngology, he spent two years at the Harbor-UCLA Medical Center in general surgery, then moved his young family to Northwestern University Medical School Hospital in

Chicago, Illinois.

He later moved back to Southern California – to another UCLA-affiliated hospital, St. Mary's in Long Beach, where he began his career in ENT and OTO-HNS, including cancer surgery.

Although he's not currently involved in research, Dr. Ramirez recognizes the strong necessity for increased investigation in all aspects of cancer.

"There is a critical need for continued cancer research and new surgical techniques for cancer patients," he emphasizes.

As a dedicated physician, Dr. Ramirez is actively involved in the treatment of cancer patients and performs facial plastic and reconstructive surgery. However, he manages to find a healthy balance between career and family.

He and his wife, Rosie, have four children and spend much of their time at soccer, basketball and softball games. In addition, Dr. Ramirez even finds time to sing in a rock band and coach his daughter's basketball team.



National survey ranks Latino cancer issues

A national *Redes En Acción* survey of key opinion leaders identified access to cancer screening and care as the number one cancer issue facing Latinos. Preliminary results of the survey were presented at the 2nd Annual *Redes En Acción* National Steering Committee Meeting in August.

Of more than 600 respondents, the majority work with Latinos in cancer-related fields, primarily representing community-based organizations, academic institutions and cancer centers around the country. Individuals surveyed included researchers, educators, health professionals and Latino health advocates.

The top five cancer issues affecting Latinos, after access to cancer screening and care, were tobacco, patient/doctor communication, nutrition and risk communication, according to the survey. Those surveyed ranked the most important cancer sites with regard to Latinos as breast, cervical and lung, followed by colorectal, prostate, liver and stomach cancers.

With regard to access to cancer screening and care, survey respondents made the following recommendations:

- ▶ **Research** Study differences in quality of physician care in different settings, such as HMOs, comparing Latinos to other race/ethnic groups.
- ▶ **Health professions education** Increase the number and proficiency of Spanish-speaking health professionals who conduct screening.
- ▶ **Public education** Develop partnerships with Latino-oriented community-based organizations regarding treatment and prevention.

Results of the survey, still undergoing thorough analysis, will be developed into a report on Latino cancer in the United States and released later this year.

NSC Meeting continued from page 1

participants. "Among Hispanic adults, cancer is the second-leading cause of death next to heart disease."

Congressman Rodriguez was among a distinguished group of speakers lined up for this year's meeting. The view from Washington was further articulated by John Ruffin, PhD, Director of the new National Center on Minority Health and Health Disparities, and Ken Chu, PhD, National Cancer Institute Health Scientist Administrator and *Redes* Program Director.

Dr. Ruffin offered an overview of the Center and the challenges we face in bridging the health gaps that exist with Latinos and other priority populations. Dr. Chu helped steering committee participants define the measures NCI will use to determine the success of *Redes En Acción*.

In addition, featured speakers included Francisco G. Cigarroa, MD, President of the University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio (the first Latino in the U.S. to head a health science center); Texas Representative Irma Rangel, a breast and ovarian cancer survivor whose South Texas district is largely Latino;

and Armin D. Weinberg, PhD, Director of the Chronic Disease Prevention and Control Research Center at Baylor College of Medicine.

The *Redes* National Steering Committee includes a cross-section of renowned cancer experts and authorities from various fields, including scientists, academicians and leading Latino health and communications experts.



"We need to amass evidence to convince people that disparity is real... I know that when things get tough, I'm going to need you. You're going to be in the trenches. You're going to have to help me make things happen."

—Dr. John Ruffin



"I believe that each person in this room is a role model, and that we have a responsibility to reach back and help somebody else. Let us all commit some time to ignite a spark... this is where it starts."

—Dr. Francisco Cigarroa



"As members of *Redes En Acción*, you understand that unless we educate our policy makers, we are not going to be able to do the things that we need to do. Don't assume that we know. Because we don't, unless you tell us."

—U.S. Congressman Ciro Rodriguez

National PSA campaign promotes Latino cancer study participation

Redes En Acción has launched a new public awareness initiative with a national media campaign informing Latinos about the availability of cancer studies and benefits of participation in clinical trials.

Although Latinos comprise 12.5 percent of the U.S. population and are the nation's fastest-growing minority group, in cancer research participation, the percentage of Latinos falls dramatically below non-Hispanic whites. In National Cancer Institute cancer clinical trials, the proportion of Latino participants is less than 6 percent, as compared to 85 percent representation by non-Hispanic whites.

"Many Latinos are unaware of the opportunities available to take part in cutting-edge cancer research," noted Amelie G. Ramirez, DrPH, *Redes En Acción* Principal Investigator. "This means that ongoing cancer research does not adequately reflect the needs of Latinos, and that many Latino cancer patients are missing out on opportunities to receive the latest cancer treatments."

Through the new national public service campaign, *Redes En Acción*, in partnership with the Cancer Information Service (CIS), is addressing the under-representation of Latinos in cancer studies. Through a series of video, audio and print public service announcements (PSAs), the campaign encourages Latinos to learn how to take part in clinical trials.

PSAs produced in both English and Spanish have been distributed to hundreds of television, radio, newspaper and magazine media around the country. Developed by *Redes En Acción*, the PSAs provide a toll-free CIS telephone number and urge Latinos to call for information about cancer research in general and, in particular, studies taking place in their area.

The PSA campaign is part of ongoing cancer awareness, research and training efforts of *Redes En Acción*.



The national *Redes En Acción* media campaign includes Spanish- and English-language print, TV and radio PSAs.

Med students serve as cancer 'ambassadors'

Some 4th-year medical students at the University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio (UTHSCSA) are pioneering a new concept in promoting cancer awareness among Latinos.

The seven students are part of the UTHSCSA's new Community Cancer Ambassador Program, which was initiated this fall by the school's Hispanic Center of Excellence. In their role as "ambassadors," the students offer a new cancer education resource for the community, including the media, Latino cancer patients and families, and the general public.

"The program was created because of the increased need for medical literacy about cancer," said Martha A. Medrano, MD, MPH, Director of the Hispanic Center of Excellence and *Redes En Acción* Co-Principal Investigator for the South Central Regional Network Center. "We are teaching our students to be culturally and linguistically competent, patient centered and community minded."

During the academic year, the students are being called upon for a variety of public education functions. Among these are health fairs, radio and television interviews, and presentations to community organizations. Students also will be asked to attend regional minority conferences and distribute the *Redes En Acción* newsletter.



Participating in a health fair as student ambassadors are, left to right, Ana Maria Rojas, Manuel Ybarra and Marissa Hernandez, all fourth-year medical students at the University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio.

One of the top priorities for "ambassadors" will be patient education. The program is partnering with the Barrio Comprehensive Family Health Clinic's Patient Education Department to allow students to give cancer presentations to patients. In addition, students are learning how to develop bilingual handouts about cancer-related topics.

This focus on patients addresses a common problem for medical students, Dr. Medrano noted. "The medical students spend their first two years in medical school learning medical terminology," she said. "Then when they are in their clinical rotations, they are faced with the dilemma of how they can translate medical terminology to day-to-day language that is understandable to their patients."

The current ambassadors, who are involved in their clinical rotations this year, are receiving ongoing training to help them fulfill their cancer public-education responsibilities. A *Redes En Acción* partner, the Cancer Information Service, is assisting in several areas, including health fair display development, public speaking and media interviews.

For their efforts, students receive small stipends, with payments varying from \$5 to \$20 per hour, depending on the type of activity. Funding for the program is provided by the Hispanic Center of Excellence.

Note from NHMA

The National Hispanic Medical Association has scheduled its 2002 annual conference. Mark your calendars for the 6th Annual NHMA Conference, to be conducted March 22-24, 2002 at the Hyatt Regency Capitol Hill, Washington, D.C. For more information, call (202) 628-5895 or e-mail NHMA@NHMAMD.ORG.

Applications accepted for new pilot projects

Researchers will soon have another opportunity to see their concepts for Latino-oriented cancer investigations take shape as a *Redes En Acción* pilot research project.

The deadline for applications for the next pilot project funding cycle is November 14. Investigators who wish to apply should submit a one-page concept paper to their *Redes En Acción* Regional Network Center.

Maximum funding for pilot research involving cancer issues related to Latinos is \$50,000, including direct and indirect costs. *Redes En Acción* serves as an avenue for National Cancer Institute funding for the studies.

Proposed projects must have the potential to produce results that can be leveraged into subsequent peer-reviewed funding, such as an R01 NIH-type proposal. In addition, projects must address one or more of the following cancer sites: breast, cervical, lung, colorectal or prostate.

To be eligible, the applicant must have a doctoral degree and affiliation with an academic institution, and have never received R01 funding in the past. Community-based organizations also can apply as long as they have Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval.

Investigators wishing to apply should contact their nearest *Redes En Acción* Regional Network Center for information, guidelines and application schedules. Contact information may be found in the box on the back of this newsletter or at the *Redes* web site (www.redesenaccion.org).

www.redesenaccion.org

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