



The National Hispanic/Latino Cancer Network

[www.redesenaccion.org](http://www.redesenaccion.org)

Spring 2003 Vol. 4, No. 1

## Nationwide Latino genetics conference scheduled in June

New ground will be broken next month when Latinos from around the country gather in Washington, DC to open dialogue, discussion and debate about human genetics issues and their significance to the Hispanic/Latino population.

The first-of-its-kind project, called the Hispanic/Latino Genetics Community Consultation Network (HLGCCN) summit meeting, will bring together 75 key opinion leaders and genetics experts from Hispanic/Latino communities across the United States. In addition, participants will include 20-25 federal government health officials.

*“Despite all of the remarkable advances in human genetics research, people are generally unaware of many of the issues in this field that directly impact the public.”*

—Dr. Amelie Ramirez

*Redes En Acción*, the Baylor College of Medicine and research institutions of the National Institutes of Health are coordinating the June 22-24 conference. The purpose of the HLGCCN project is to provide a forum for Latinos to identify, prioritize and disseminate information on genetics issues, particularly those that confront the Hispanic/Latino community, notes Amelie G. Ramirez, DrPH, Principal Investigator of the HLGCCN project and *Redes En Acción*.

“Despite all of the remarkable advances in human genetics research, people are generally unaware of many of the issues in this field that directly impact the public,” said Dr. Ramirez. “With this project we’re developing a participatory model for involving Latinos in

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Assisting with preparations for the HLGCCN summit meeting were members of the Conference Planning Committee, including (left photo) John Castillo and Lillian Gaya-González, PhD, and (right photo) Rosa Martha Zárate-Macías and Víctor B. Penchaszadeh, MD.

## Inside



*Redes En Acción* recently celebrated its third anniversary. The past year has been extremely active, and early indications point to a busy summer leading into an equally action-packed fourth year of the program.

Summer activities include two major meetings coordinated by *Redes En Acción*. In addition to the annual National Steering Committee meeting in August, the initiative is joining forces with Baylor College of Medicine and several research institutions of the National Institutes of Health to sponsor the Hispanic/Latino Genetics Community Consultation Network (HLGCCN) summit meeting in Washington, DC June 22-24. Plans for the HLGCCN conference are described in our lead story.

As preparations move ahead for these meetings, *Redes En Acción* National Network Center researchers are engaged in a new study in South Texas exploring the impact of different strategies aimed at promoting health messages for the general public. The project will examine the use of both free and paid TV/radio airtime, as well as traditional public relations. For more details see the story on page 3.

Also, the *Redes En Acción* research team has announced availability of another cancer education web site — a product of the Replication of the *A Su Salud En Acción* study. The story is on page 6.

All of this comes to you in this issue along with our other news, including activities of the National Hispanic Medical Association, and the inspirational stories of various Hispanic/Latino role models engaged in health professions.

**Amelie G. Ramirez, DrPH**  
Principal Investigator  
*Redes En Acción*

*Redes En Acción*: The National Hispanic/Latino Cancer Network is a major Special Populations Networks initiative supported by the National Cancer Institute.

The primary purpose is to create a national and regional infrastructure for collaboration among grassroots leaders, local communities, researchers and public health professionals to stimulate cancer control research, training and awareness. Through network activities, *Redes En Acción* is establishing training and research opportunities for Latino students and researchers, generating research projects on key cancer issues impacting Latinos and supporting cancer awareness activities.

The *Redes Report* is produced quarterly by *Redes En Acción*: The National Hispanic/Latino Cancer Network, NCI Grant No. UO 1 CA 86117-01



# RESEARCH

## Exploring Barriers

**Elba Saavedra, MS**  
*Albuquerque, New Mexico*

For Elba Saavedra, *en la unión está la fuerza* (in unity there is strength) is more than a motto. It is a principle that has guided her research career.

Elba, a PhD candidate and Research Scientist at the University of New Mexico Cancer Research and Treatment Center, has dedicated most of that career to the health of Hispanic/Latino women. Her dissertation research and interest in reducing the barriers to breast cancer detection and care have been instrumental in uniting Latinas in a program called “*Comadre a Comadre (CAC): A One-on-One Peer Support for Hispanic Women and Their Families.*”

Funded by the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation, CAC is a bilingual, bicultural project that addresses the unique needs of Latinas newly diagnosed with breast cancer and their families. CAC offers free support, guidance and information on cancer resources through a “supportive friend” who has already been there – the *comadre*.



Elba’s early research career began at the UCLA Johnson Comprehensive Cancer Center as a bilingual interviewer for cancer control projects among ethnically and racially diverse women in the Los Angeles area. She conducted interviews with participants in a study of adherence to follow-up to abnormal mammograms.

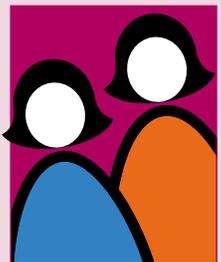
“The experience with these projects really enhanced my interest in pursuing higher education and made me aware of issues such as access to care and barriers that exist for some women when obtaining a diagnostic evaluation for breast cancer,” she says.

Elba has five years of extensive experience in research, focusing on barriers to breast cancer care in New Mexico’s ethnically diverse and underserved women. She has written several New Mexico Department of Health reports examining barriers to care in breast cancer diagnosis and treatment among this population. In 1997, she co-authored a report for the Department of Health Breast and Cervical Cancer Program titled “Barriers to Breast Cancer Care.”

Her research led to the creation of “*Comadre a Comadre.*” As Principal Investigator, she is most proud of the active involvement and input of Hispanic breast cancer survivors to the proposal and later planning of the program.

“The peer volunteers are cancer survivors or loved ones of survivors who are recruited and trained to become *comadres* and *compadres*,” she says. “Their dedication to the Hispanic culture and their commitment to advocacy in breast cancer have made the project a success.”

Contributed by: **Patricia Cerda-Arguijo**  
Hispanic Center of Excellence Program Coordinator  
*Redes En Acción* South Central Region



# TRAINING

## Redes Internship

**Michael Forrest**  
*Miami, Florida*

Michael Forrest never thought his future career goals would include working in the cancer research field until last summer, when he participated in a *Redes En Acción* Southeast Regional Network Center internship. A sophomore at the University of Miami majoring in psychology with a chemistry and Spanish minor, Michael now plans to become a pediatrician and is definitely considering cancer research in his future endeavors.

During his internship at the University of Miami/Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center, Michael learned about the barriers and disconnects Latinos face when dealing with cancer and cancer-related issues. As an intern, he was provided with several opportunities for training, such as the IRB Certification Course:



Protection of Human Research Subjects and advanced computer training, as well as the opportunity to attend medical lectures and presentations. Importantly, the experience also allowed Michael to intern on the prostate cancer-stress study under Frank J. Penedo, PhD, in the Department of Behavioral Medicine, where he was instrumental in the recruitment of Latino prostate cancer patients.

Under the mentorship of Angel Loor, MA, *Redes* Coordinator for the Southeast Region, one of Michael’s accomplishments during his internship was his coordination duties and participation in a student focus group. He learned about the process and the steps necessary to carry out such a study, but more importantly, he received firsthand experience in collecting and measuring attitudes and behaviors of Hispanic/Latino students and their experiences with cancer. In addition, he was able to achieve a better understanding of the complexity of determinants that affect how Latino students choose career goals.

Born of Cuban parents, Michael grew up learning to appreciate his heritage and it has become a vital role in his life. “It is part of my lifestyle and it determines a lot of who I am and how I act,” he noted.

In seeking an internship, Michael looked for an opportunity that would support and enhance his career goals. “*Redes En Acción* seemed like the perfect program I could grow with and that could teach me a lot,” he says. “I really liked the idea of it being centered around Hispanics because I could be more comfortable with fellow Hispanics than I might be with others.”

Contributed by: **Martha Oliveros**  
Cancer Information Service Coordinator  
*Redes En Acción* Southeast Region



# AWARENESS

## Teens Against Tobacco

**Sugeni Perez**

*New York, New York*

The impact of the tobacco industry's well-financed marketing campaign on Hispanic/Latino youth is apparent, so Sugeni Perez constantly works to counter its damage in the community.

Sugeni, Program Coordinator for Teens Against Tobacco Use (TATU) at Alianza Dominicana Inc. in New York City, knows the limited financial resources of the community-based program can't match the billions of dollars spent by tobacco companies. "TATU has tried to overcome this barrier by participating in cultural events and other activities that are important to our community to make sure people hear our anti-tobacco message loud and clear," she said.

TATU has given Sugeni an opportunity to educate the communities of Washington Heights/Inwood and Harlem about



the dangers of smoking and second-hand smoke. This program has not only focused on youth from the community but also educates the adult community on the ill effects of tobacco. "My goal is to prevent youth from smoking and to teach the adult community the dangers of environmental tobacco smoke so that they keep their homes smoke-free," she says.

Sugeni uses TATU's peer educational model to train the youth to be tobacco control advocates and go into the community and educate their peers on the negative effects of tobacco use. She also works with organizers to facilitate anti-tobacco workshops for the community's adult population. These workshops have proven very successful because they are held not only in community centers, but also in non-traditional settings such as beauty parlors.

Born in New York, Sugeni moved to the Dominican Republic at a young age before returning to the States at age 10. She received a B.A. from Columbia University. At the Center for Health Promotion and Education in Alianza Dominicana Inc., an agency that offers free social services in the community, she works to raise awareness of the health risks of tobacco smoke, focusing on the types of cancer that can result from tobacco consumption.

Sugeni believes that for the community to become more involved in cancer awareness, cancer control advocates must incorporate their message into all issues relevant to the community so that cancer is not seen as a separate issue. "I believe that we have been successful in raising the level of awareness about the harmful effects of tobacco smoke," she says.

Contributed by: **Nereida Borrero**, RN, MSN, GNP  
*Redes En Acción* Coordinator  
Brooklyn, New York

## Study will examine health communication strategies

**Redes En Acción** National Network Center investigators are initiating a health communication study promoting cancer research participation in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas, using public service announcements (PSAs), paid advertising and traditional public relations approaches.

The project, "An Experimental Media and Public Relations Study to Examine Promoting Cancer Studies among Hispanic Audiences in South Texas," will assess responses to the different media strategies over a four-week period beginning in May.

To study effectiveness of the various media-related options, researchers will use a series of television and radio PSAs developed previously by *Redes En Acción*. The PSAs were created for a nationwide media campaign promoting Hispanic/Latino cancer clinical trial

awareness and participation, and will be used as paid ads in the research project.

For the study, air time for the ads will be purchased on TV and radio stations in the predominantly Hispanic/Latino cities of the Lower Rio Grande Valley. A video news release promoting cancer research participation among Latinos also will be distributed in these border communities. In the remainder of Texas, the PSAs will be re-distributed to broadcast media outlets for free, or non-paid, airtime. In addition, in San Antonio a traditional public relations campaign combined with the non-paid PSAs will be conducted.

For study evaluation, the National Cancer Institute's Cancer Information Service will track the number of calls generated by each of the different public health communication strategies.

## Spanish-language fact sheets available on Komen web site

Fifty Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation fact sheets focusing on a variety of breast health issues are now available in Spanish.

The Facts for Life series of fact sheets, which can be accessed on the Komen Foundation web site ([www.komen.org](http://www.komen.org)), provide information about the breast and breast cancer, risk factors, early detection, diagnosis, treatment, support, special populations and other subjects.

Hispanics/Latinos make up the fastest-growing ethnic group online, according to recent reports noted by the Komen Foundation. Just in the past year, the number of Hispanic/Latina Internet users increased 13 percent – from 6.7 million to 7.6 million, according to the reports.



# Oncologist: 'Cancer found me'

**Salvador José Saldivar, MD**  
*Lubbock, Texas*



Dr. Salvador José Saldivar will soon start a four-year Gynecology Oncology fellowship at MD Anderson Cancer Center, which is highly regarded for its work in gynecological cancer. Upon completion, he plans to return to his hometown of El Paso, Texas as the first and only Latino gyno-oncologist in the city.

Asked why he chose to work with cancer patients, Dr. Salvador responds, "Cancer, in a way, found me. I found a sense of responsibility to seek a career that encompasses preventive services, offers cures and educates."

Growing up in El Paso the son of an auto mechanic, he spent most of his younger days in his father's shop. As the oldest of five brothers and a sister, he seemed predestined to follow in his father's footsteps. "It was not until high school that I knew I had the *cabeza* to go into further education," he recalls.

After completing college at the University of Texas at El Paso, then medical school at the University of Illinois at Chicago, he served a general surgery internship at Texas Tech University, which exposed him to various areas within the hospital. "It was not until my rotation through the gynecology oncology service that I felt most complete and productive," he says.

Dr. Saldivar believes "cancer patients pose many challenging issues – medical, surgical and psychosocial – not inherent in

other services." A one-month experience as a Galloway Fellow at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center confirmed his career path as a gyno-oncologist.

Currently, Dr. Saldivar is a junior faculty member in the Ob/Gyn Department at Texas Tech Medical Center in Lubbock. Along with his academic duties, he is involved in studies focusing on premalignant phases of cervical carcinogenesis.

"My interest in this area arose because of the increased prevalence of Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) and cervical dysplasia in our border community," he says.

"There are numerous barriers to care for Hispanic women in this country. Among those factors, patients' beliefs and attitudes about cervical cancer have played a role in their limited medical utilization."

Dr. Saldivar is devoting his career to educating and caring for oncology patients in his community. The path to this point in his life has not been easy or straight, but he feels he has never lost sight of his goal to help his community. To others interested in cancer or Latino health care, he emphasizes, "More power to you...you are needed. Stay focused, never forget your roots...we will find a cure."

Contributed by: **John Sentz**, Intern  
National Hispanic Medical Association

## NHMA NEWS

### Medical organization alliance formed

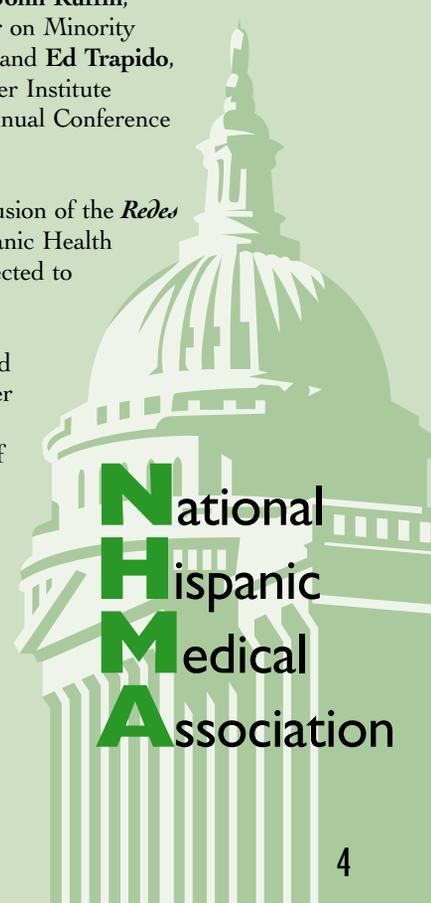
The National Hispanic Medical Association (NHMA) is one of four medical associations involved in a new collaboration entitled the Alliance of Minority Medical Associations. The Alliance is made up of the Asian Pacific Islanders Physicians Association, Association of American Indian Physicians, National Hispanic Medical Association and National African American Medical Association. The first major effort of the coalition will be a National Leadership Summit on Racial/Ethnic Disparities in Health, scheduled for April 2004 (National Minority Health Month) in Washington, DC with the Department of Health and Human Services. The White House also has been requested to sponsor the summit, and the official designation is pending. The purpose of the event will be to showcase disparity areas, such as cancer, HIV-AIDS, heart disease, diabetes, immunizations, mental health and infant mortality, and to discuss current data and strategies to decrease those disparities.

▶ NHMA President **Elena Rios**, MD, MSPH, was invited to testify at the recent press conference of Congressman Robert Menendez and Congresswoman Deborah Pryce on the introduction of the Cancer Patient Navigator Act.

▶ **Amelie Ramirez**, DrPH, Principal Investigator of *Redes En Acción*, presented at the plenary session titled "Model Hispanic Research Program" with Drs. **John Ruffin**, Director of the National Center on Minority Health and Health Disparities, and **Ed Trapido**, representing the National Cancer Institute Director, at the NHMA 7th Annual Conference in March.

▶ NHMA supports the inclusion of the *Redes En Acción* program in the Hispanic Health Improvement Act of 2003, expected to be introduced in April by Congressman **Ciro Rodriguez**, Congresswoman **Hilda Solis** and Senator **Jeff Bingaman**. Another section of the bill includes recruitment and development of faculty and student activities through the Hispanic-Serving Health Professions Schools, those institutions with 9 percent Hispanic/Latino student enrollment.

▶ In May, NHMA begins Capitol Hill Briefings on Hispanic Health. The first is scheduled May 22 on Diversity in the Health Workforce.



**N**ational  
**H**ispanic  
**M**edical  
**A**ssociation

# FOCUS: *Redes* Co-Principal Investigator José Martí



**José Martí, MD, MSc, Co-Principal Investigator** for the Northeast Region, is Chief of Surgical Oncology at the Brooklyn Hospital Center, and Associate Professor of Clinical Surgery of NY Presbyterian Weill Cornell Medical School.

## **Briefly describe the primary project you're currently working on.**

I am focusing on the awareness, research and training endeavors of *Redes En Acción*, as well as coordinating all clinical, diagnostic and screening procedures for minority and medically underserved patients with cancer at the Brooklyn Hospital Center. I am also a member of the planning committee for the new Hispanic/Latino Genetics Community Consultation Network project.

## **What are your major areas of research interest?**

I have spent my entire professional career in the evolving process of prevention, diagnosis and treatment of neoplastic diseases, which includes community outreach for early detection and cancer awareness, as well as trials on chemoprevention, specifically regarding retinoids in cancers of the head and neck. I have participated in several clinical trials, and have been particularly interested in the enrollment of minority patients in these trials. I am also interested in comprehensive multi-disciplinary approaches to cancer for underserved minority communities that do not normally have access to larger centers.

## **What do you consider your most notable achievement?**

My most notable achievement is my ability to treat the patient and not the disease. I value my relationship with my patients, and find this approach particularly useful when providing medical care to underserved minority populations.

## **Who has inspired you most in your work - and why?**

I have been inspired both by patients and peers. Right after completing

medical school, I worked for a year in central Mexico as the sole family physician for 2,000 farmers and their families. Working with them gave me the chance to see what the combination of pain, poverty and suffering can do to a community. I was reminded of this experience during my surgical residency research in tumor immunology, when I realized the complexity of cancer and the significance of early detection and prevention efforts. Being one of the only Latino doctors in my work and academic environments, I received support from Anglo- and African-American colleagues, such as Dr. Harold Freeman and Dr. Lasalle Lefall Jr., to pursue my interests. I looked to breakthroughs in cancer by the introduction of radical procedures by physicians such as Hayes Martin (head and neck cancer) and William Halsted (breast cancer), and continued to be fascinated by the evolutionary process of the academic cancer field departing from radical procedures to less-invasive surgeries, without sacrificing final outcomes.

## **What are the most important issues related to Latinos and cancer?**

Northeast regional issues include diverse fatalistic cultural beliefs, fear of deportation and lifestyle choices known to have a relation to the development of cancer. Latinos in general must deal with socioeconomic barriers to health care access and language barriers in communicating to health care workers among an increasingly diverse Hispanic/Latino population.

## **How can awareness of cancer prevention, such as the importance of screening, be raised among Latinos?**

Through community outreach, multifaceted education from multiple sources and elimination of current barriers to equal health care access, as well as by increasing the pool of Hispanic/Latino healthcare professionals.

## **What single piece of advice would you give a young Latino who aspires to a career in the cancer field?**

Do not forget where you come from and try your best to make your community a better place.

## **What do you hope will be your legacy?**

I hope my efforts will have helped to eliminate disparities in relationship to cancer outcomes as well as the eradication of current language barriers in our community health care systems.

## Nationwide Latino Genetics conference

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identifying and discussing these issues and examining those that are of greatest significance to our Hispanic/Latino population."

In addition to participants gathering in Washington, DC, a larger number of Latinos around the country will take part in identification of priority genetics issues through pre-meeting surveys using the Delphi process. The surveys will be administered in collaboration with the University of Maryland.

The HLGCCN project is a combined effort of *Redes En Acción* and Baylor College of Medicine with the National Institute of General Medical Sciences (NIGMS), National Human Genome Research Institute (NHGRI) and National Cancer Institute (NCI) (specifically, the

Specialized Programs of Research Excellence, Cancer Genetics Network and Special Populations Networks).

Leadership of several National Institutes of Health (NIH) supporting institutions will participate on panels at the summit meeting. The panel responding to strategic, action and dissemination plans determined by conference participants will include Dr. Andrew C. von Eschenbach, NCI Director; Dr. Francis Collins, NHGRI Director; and Dr. Judith Greenberg, NIGMS Acting Director. Dr. Greenberg and Dr. Raynard Kington, Deputy Director of NIH, will serve on a conference welcoming panel chaired by Dr. Jorge Gomez, Chief, Organ System Branch of NCI.

The meeting in Washington, DC is

intended to provide much-needed information and feedback for federal policy makers who are addressing human genetics issues involving research, health care, training and public education, said Dr. Ramirez.

"This project is a very significant event," she said. "It will increase the knowledge of the Hispanic/Latino community's research priorities, ethical issues significant to this population, and needs and opportunities for fostering issues as they relate to Latinos.

"In addition, it is extremely important that the number of Latinos participating in clinical genetic research be increased, and this project has tremendous potential to help achieve that."



# New web site available for *A Su Salud* program



A new web site developed by the *Redes En Acción* National Network Center offers information to the public and local health agencies about the *A Su Salud En Acción* program, a nationally tested model for enabling communities to mount an effective campaign to reach specific audiences with tailored messages for cancer prevention and control and other health risks.

The model was the basis for the Replication of the *A Su Salud En Acción* Program, a study funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The new web site and in-depth, step-by-step training materials were components of the study.

The *A Su Salud En Acción* program grew out of studies exploring optimal ways to provide health information to large segments of the public. The rationale for the program is anchored in several proven, comprehensive theories that describe how people learn new information and perform new skills.

The model has been implemented and tested with a variety of health risks, different ethnic groups and in a wide assortment of communities in the United States and other countries. For example, the model, as applied in the CDC-funded replication project, focused attention on building community programs promoting goals of the National Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program (NBCCEDP) of the CDC. Specifically, the study provided a guide to help community health agencies develop programs encouraging breast and cervical cancer screening awareness and participation among low-income Hispanic/Latina women.

To learn more about *A Su Salud En Acción* and its potential for building community health promotion programs, go to [www.salud-replication.org](http://www.salud-replication.org).

The *Redes Report* is produced quarterly by *Redes En Acción*: The National Hispanic/Latino Cancer Network, NCI Grant No. UO 1 CA 86117-01

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