



Latino cancer experts celebrate *Redes* impact

Redes En Acción's "ripple effect" in promoting Latino cancer research, training and awareness may create "a tsunami that can wipe out cancer disparities among Latinos," noted a participant at the recent 7th Annual *Redes En Acción* National Steering Committee Meeting.

More than 80 Latino health and cancer authorities gathered from around the country to celebrate the initiative's achievements over the past seven years and hear a variety of panel presentations and guest speakers. The theme of this year's meeting was *Amplifying the Redes Ripple Effect*.

"In the same way a raindrop creates a ripple when it hits a still body of water, a *Redes* ripple is created when our network members conduct research, training or many other activities that help reduce health disparities among Latinos across the nation," said Amelie G. Ramirez, DrPH, *Redes En Acción* Principal Investigator. "It gives me great satisfaction and pride to observe this *Redes* ripple effect yield more and more ripples as we continue to shape this program into one of growing influence."

Although the "ripples" created by *Redes En Acción* are reflected in a variety of innovative strategies addressing cancer disparities in the country's Latino population, perhaps the most dramatic impact has been seen in

programs promoting new research.

"If you want to know what a *Redes* ripple looks like," said investigator Anna Nápoles-Springer, PhD, "you're looking at one."

After receiving National Cancer Institute support through the *Redes* pilot project program, Dr. Nápoles-Springer has garnered additional research funding from NCI and the California Breast Cancer Research Program. As a pilot research program success story, at the meeting she participated on a panel titled "The *Redes* Ripple Effect: Research & Training." Another panel presentation, "The *Redes* Effect: Public Education Dissemination," highlighted several collaborations with organizations around the United States and Puerto Rico to raise awareness of cancer issues among Latinos.

In addition to the numerous examples of *Redes En Acción*'s continuing impact on cancer among Latinos, the meeting produced insight into possible paths to resolving disparities affecting this population. Guest speaker Eduardo Sanchez, MD, Director of the Institute for Health Policy, University of Texas School of Public Health at Houston, advocated a focused effort in changing health policy.

Getting the message across to policymakers, he said, requires activists to prepare, connect, educate, ask and



Dr. Eduardo Sanchez



Dr. Leonel Vela

follow up – and show the perception, practicality, price and politics of the policy issue being addressed.

"Providing assistance is not a sign of weakness," Dr. Sanchez emphasized. "It's empowerment."

Earlier in the meeting, participants heard speaker Leonel Vela, MD, outline a model program aimed at reducing health disparities in an area of Texas

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Redes En Acción: The National Latino Cancer Research Network is a major Community Networks Program 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 Latino Cancer Research Network, NCI Grant No. 1 U01 CA114657-01

TRAINING

Angelica Perez, MPH, Duarte, California

Training for success

For Angelica Perez, training outside the classroom represented an excellent opportunity to expand her knowledge, gain experience and advance her research career.

A participant in minority scientist training with *Redes En Acción* and other programs, Angelica received her Master of Public Health with a concentration in epidemiology from San Diego State University and now serves as a Clinical Research Assistant at City of Hope in Duarte, California. City of Hope is a leading Southern California biomedical research and treatment center, and hospital for cancer and other life-threatening diseases.

“The training experience exposed me to the field of cancer control research,” she says. “I learned that there is a social and behavioral aspect to cancer disparities in Latinos,



and that I could use my knowledge of the Latino community to make an impact.”

Angelica’s *Redes* research experience focused on prevention of cancer and other chronic diseases through lifestyle changes. She learned to implement and evaluate programs that offered nutrition education to Latinos living in the U.S.-Mexico border region. In addition, she taught families to practice healthy habits in the home, so that the younger generations will be less burdened with obesity, cancer and diabetes.

Now, in her role at the comprehensive cancer center, she is implementing a nutrition and physical activity intervention, as well as offering screening services, at several community recreation centers in underserved communities.

“During my training experience, I was exposed to a wealth of resources that I now use for the communities I serve,” she says.

RESEARCH

Martha Soledad Vela Acosta, MD, PhD, Brownsville, Texas

Focusing on farmworker health

The health of migrant and seasonal farmworkers is vitally important to Dr. Martha Soledad Vela Acosta. Indeed, she has dedicated her professional career to research and prevention of occupational health hazards in this underserved population.

Dr. Vela Acosta, an Assistant Professor in the Division of Environmental and Occupational Health Sciences at the University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston School of Public Health (Brownsville Campus), has most recently been associated with the Hispanic Health Research Center in the Lower Rio Grande Valley.



In the past she has worked with several agricultural health centers in the Midwest and Texas, focusing on farmworkers, and Hispanic and immigrant worker populations. As a bilingual physician and researcher, she possesses the professional background and expertise to appreciate the complex issues related to serving the health needs of Spanish-speaking populations with low literacy levels.

Currently, Dr. Vela Acosta is engaged in the research activities of two National Institutes of Health-supported studies in the Rio Grande Valley:

- Co-Investigator, *National Center on Minority Health and Health Disparities (NCMHD): Creation of an Hispanic Health Research Center in the Lower Rio Grande Valley*
- Investigator, *Southwest Center for Occupational and Environmental Health (SWCOEH)*

“There is a scarcity of knowledge about farmworkers and all their occupational chronic health outcomes,” says Dr. Vela Acosta.

As for the ultimate significance of her studies in the Valley, she adds, “Training professionals in occupational and public health will contribute to improve the health outcomes of our local communities.”

AWARENESS

Peggy Rios, PhD, Miami, Florida

Education, support – and hope

Rewards come in a variety of forms. Just ask Dr. Peggy Rios, Program Director of The Wellness Community in Miami.

“My work days are focused on preparing educational and support programs that directly address people’s problems,” says Dr. Rios. “I see the



outcome of my work immediately reflected in their faces. I see the results when our Spanish support groups fill our living rooms and I see people hugging and laughing.

“Sometimes I see results even more powerfully when someone reports enhanced medical treatment due to information they accessed through our programs.”

For the past five years, Dr. Rios, who earned her PhD in counseling psychology from the University of Maryland, has guided activities of The Wellness Community, a nonprofit organization dedicated to providing support and education – and hope – for people affected by cancer. In addition, she is a lecturer in the University of Miami School of Education.

At The Wellness Community, Dr. Rios interacts with participants on an

ongoing basis. Often, she says, after a program their comments focus on how they’ve learned something new about cancer treatment or stress management, or that they have found a new circle of support.

“But every once in a while, someone comes into my office and tells me that they used to be scared and felt helpless in this new country battling this disease and that the support they found at The Wellness Community has given them hope and the will to keep fighting,” she says.

Dr. Rios refuses to take credit for that, but still, she notes, “I feel good to be a part – however small – of it.”

Web site aids cancer program developers

When it comes to developing a cancer control program for Latinos – or any other audience – help is only a click away.

A Web-based portal, Cancer Control P.L.A.N.E.T., provides access to data and free evidence-based resources that can help planners, program staff and researchers design, implement and evaluate cancer control programs. P.L.A.N.E.T. stands for Plan, Link, Act, Network with Evidence-based Tools.

The Web site offers a user-friendly five-step process for developing a comprehensive cancer control plan or program:

- Assess program priorities
- Identify potential partners
- Research reviews of different intervention approaches
- Find evidence-based intervention programs and products
- Plan and evaluate your program

Visit P.L.A.N.E.T. to generate dynamic views of data (i.e., comparison tables, graphs and maps) from state cancer registries. You may select Hispanic incidence rates, historical trends, demographic data and interactive maps by



state. In addition, the site provides a program development plan using information on specific cancer control topics, such as breast cancer or tobacco control.

P.L.A.N.E.T. is a collaborative effort, co-sponsored by the National Cancer Institute, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, American Cancer Society, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, and Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. For more information or training on P.L.A.N.E.T., contact your local Cancer Information Service Partnership Program at 1-800-4-CANCER.

Cancer Control P.L.A.N.E.T. is accessible at <http://cancercontrolplanet.cancer.gov>.

Redes impact

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with a dense concentration of Latinos. Dr. Vela is Regional Dean of the Regional Academic Health Centers (RAHC), University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio.

In his “Case Study: South Texas Initiative” presentation, Dr. Vela described achievements of the RAHC program in the Lower Rio Grande Valley. The original Center, opened in Harlingen five years ago, is working to counter the significant physician shortage in the region.

Dr. Vela termed the RAHC “a catalyst ushering in new hope for health care in this area...We believe it will transform the health status of one of the most underserved areas of the country.”

The meeting’s slate of panel presentations examined cutting-edge Latino health and cancer activities. The “New Directions in Latino Health Research & Advocacy” panel featured National Institutes of Health cancer

authorities. Representing NCI were Jorge Gomez, MD, PhD, Chief, Organ Systems Branch and Shobha Srinivasan, PhD, Health Disparities Research Coordinator, Division of Cancer Control and Population Sciences.

The panel also included Paul Sorlie, PhD, Chief, Epidemiology Branch of the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, who is directing the largest long-term epidemiological study of health and disease in U.S. Latinos – the \$61 million, multi-site *Hispanic Community Health Study*. Two *Redes En Acción* Co-Principal Investigators, Gregory Talavera, MD, MPH, and Frank Penedo, PhD, joined Dr. Sorlie on the panel to discuss their key roles in this historic research project.

Another panel, “Different Perspectives in Cancer Research,” included Holly Howe, PhD, Executive Director of the North American Association of Central Cancer Registries; Andy Miller, MHSE, CHES, Director of Survivorship for the Lance Armstrong Foundation; and J. Emilio Carrillo, MD, MPH, *Redes En*



Drs. Paul Sorlie and Amelie Ramirez

Acción Co-PI for the Northeast Region, who represented the New York-Presbyterian Community Health Plan, New York Weill Cornell Medical Center.

In addition to the panel presentations, guest speaker Tim Mahony, Associate Director of Government Affairs for the National Hispanic Medical Association, provided updates on several Congressional bills that, if enacted, would be significant to *Redes En Acción* efforts to reduce Latino cancer disparities.

NEW PROJECTS / NUEVOS PROYECTOS

Southeast Region

With a grant from the NCI Cancer Information Service (CIS) and in collaboration with Julie Kornfeld, Program Director of the CIS Coastal Region, Drs. Erin Kobetz, Principal Investigator, and Hosanna Soler-Vilá, Co-PI, recently started field data collection for the study *Examining Cultural Variability in Cancer Information Needs of CIS’ Hispanic Callers*. The pilot study is exploring associations among ethnic variability, cancer informational needs, and cervical cancer knowledge of Hispanic callers to NCI’s Spanish Cancer Line. Drs. Kobetz and Soler-Vilá are at the University of Miami School of Medicine.

Northwest Region

A new study directed by Anna Nápoles-Springer, PhD, of the University of California, San Francisco, will explore

the issue of cultural and linguistic competence of physicians with regard to colorectal cancer screening among Latinos. The two-year research project, *Patient-Reported Measures of Cultural and Linguistic Competence*, is supported by NCI.

Latinos have lower rates of colorectal cancer (CRC) screening and poorer relevant lifestyle practices than non-Hispanic Whites. Many physicians lack the necessary skills and knowledge to bridge cultural and language differences to effectively counsel Latino patients on adopting regular CRC screening and other relevant lifestyle changes. Measures of the cultural and linguistic competence of health care providers from the patient’s perspective are needed to determine if providing more culturally competent care improves CRC screening rates among Latinos. The study will develop patient-reported measures and attempt to link specific components of cultural and linguistic competence to the quality of cancer care provided.

NOTICIAS: AROUND REDES

Southwest Region

Greg Talavera, MD, MPH, Regional Co-Principal Investigator, has received multiple honors in recent months. He was given the 2007 Public Health Champion Award by the County of San Diego, Health and Human Services Agency, Public Health Services. The award recognizes “extraordinary achievement protecting and promoting the health of all people of San Diego County.” County officials held a special award reception in his honor during National Public Health Week.

Greg was also honored for Alumni Excellence by the University of California, San Diego and the UCSD Hispanic Scholarship Council at the 10th Annual *Fiesta de las Estrellas*. *Fiesta de las Estrellas* was created by the UCSD Hispanic Scholarship Council to raise scholarship funds for students, while also recognizing the achievements of the local community “*Estrellas*” – outstanding San Diego leaders who are making a difference for Latinos.

Ana Talavera, MPH, former Project Coordinator for the Southwest Region, was named to the *Día de la Mujer Latina*, Inc. Health Festival Planning Committee. *Día de la Mujer Latina* is an organization that addresses breast and cervical cancer and other health problems in Latinas. The San Diego health festival is scheduled October 27.

Northwest Region

Marynieves Díaz-Méndez, Redes En Acción Northwest Regional Outreach Coordinator, will speak on Advocacy &

Empowerment at the *Sobrevivir al Cáncer* Conference scheduled October 20 in Hayward, California. The educational event for cancer survivors, family and friends will provide information about nutrition, patients’ rights, quality of life, side effect management and more. The *Redes* Northwest Regional Network Center is a member of the *Sobrevivir al Cáncer Coalition*, a collaborative group that provides cancer education workshops in Spanish and English in the Greater Bay Area.

National Network Center

Amelie Ramirez, DrPH, Redes En Acción Principal Investigator, has been named a Susan G. Komen for the Cure 2007 Professor of Survivorship for her outstanding contributions to breast cancer survivorship. The award, which honors two survivorship advocates each year, was presented at the recent Komen for the Cure 10th annual mission conference. Award recipients, Drs. Ramirez and Sonja Eva Singletary of the University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center, receive \$25,000 to boost their work in the field.

Northeast Region



Congratulations to **Ana Nátales-Pereira, MD**, certainly one of *Redes En Acción*’s most productive pilot program investigators. Dr. Nátales-Pereira recently gave birth to triplets Ana Victoria, Sofia Eva and Lucia Belen. While *Redes En Acción* continues to create “ripple effects” in its impact on Latino cancer disparities, Dr. Nátales-Pereira is adding to the legacy with her own “triple effect.”



The *Redes Report* is produced quarterly by *Redes En Acción*: The National Latino Cancer Research Network, NCI Grant No. 1 U01 CA114657-01

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