



Redes prepares to launch national cancer patient navigator program

Latinas face numerous barriers after they receive an abnormal or suspicious breast cancer screening result. Left to negotiate health system obstacles and confusing choices and decisions, they often delay or even discontinue the care they need out of frustration. Typically, when they do ultimately receive treatment, it's for a more advanced stage of the disease.

In a new research program to be launched this summer, *Redes En Acción* hopes to alleviate these problems for hundreds of Latina patients in community clinical settings around the country over the next year.

Researchers will study the efficacy of a patient navigator program in improving patient compliance and reducing the time between abnormal screening tests and initiation of treatment. In the process, major objectives are to improve patient satisfaction with their experience in the health care system and provide much-needed psychosocial support.

"By testing this program in multiple settings, we believe this intervention will lead to a prototypical patient navigation model," said **Amelie G. Ramirez**, DrPH, *Redes* Principal Investigator. "This model of cancer care then could be replicated and disseminated in other communities



Patient navigator Sandra Veronica Covarrubias, right, works with a patient.

where Latinas confront significant disparities in cancer health care delivery."

For the study, 50 Latina adults will be recruited in each of the six *Redes En Acción* sites: New York, Miami, Houston, San Antonio, San Francisco and San Diego. To assist women after they receive an abnormal breast cancer screening result, a trained community lay health worker – the patient navigator – will communicate with them regularly to facilitate clinic visits, resolve nonmedical delays in evaluation of their clinical condition, and connect them with local resources.

Initially, participants will be given a pre-intervention survey exploring their previous personal experience with the health care system. A follow-up survey will be administered to ascertain their

Latino Cancer Summit seeks your experience

If you are a Hispanic cancer patient or survivor, *Latinas Contra Cancer* would like to hear your story – or that of a family member.

Latinas Contra Cancer is soliciting testimonials of Latino patients and/or their families about their cancer experience for the *National Latino Cancer Summit: Science Meets Service, Moving Forward Together*, scheduled July 30-August 1, 2008 in San Francisco, California. *Redes En Acción* is partnering with *Latinas Contra Cancer* to host the event.

The summit will focus attention on cancer and cancer care disparities among Latinos in the United States. The event is expected to attract cancer researchers, health policy experts, community activists, cancer survivors and health professionals.

For more information about the National Latino Cancer Summit, registration, testimonial submission, abstracts and other aspects of the event, [click here](#) to go to their website.

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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.

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A W A R E N E S S

Myrna Forestiere, Oakland, California

‘It’s all about touching a life’

When it comes to the importance of cancer education and knowledge, **Myrna Forestiere** is adamant: “Awareness in the world of cancer is everything. Awareness saves lives.”

Myrna, Director of Regional Operations for the American Cancer Society’s Greater Bay Area / Redwood Empire Region, has a very personal inspiration for doing all she can to raise cancer awareness levels in the community. For the past 12 years, her sister, Maria, has been battling a rare form of the disease that spread from the intestines to the liver. She is, says Myrna, “my hero.”

After 20 years of working in the community, Myrna understands the challenges that face underserved Latinos as well – if not better – than anyone. “You have to understand that the Latina culture works against early detection and awareness,” she says. “Sometimes our pride gets in the way.”

We know the obvious challenges – access to care, language, low education and income levels, and others. “But it

is our culture that amplifies these challenges,” she says. “We must break through the old ideas and sometimes our families and our lack of English skills can make all of this much more daunting.”

Working within the Latino community involves a two-pronged educational process: 1) for the health care providers and 2) for the Latino public. “The health care community and the Latin community need to meet in the middle to create a much higher probability of success,” she says.

The rewards of her labors aren’t easily articulated. “How can

you describe the smile on a cancer patient’s face? How can you measure satisfaction? When I spend time with a cancer patient and I am able to provide help or comfort, however small, it puts life into perspective for me,” says Myrna. “It’s at that exact moment that I know I am doing the work I was meant to do. For me, it’s all about touching a life.”



R E S E A R C H

DeAnne K. Messias, PhD, RN, Columbia, South Carolina

Immigration and health

As a Brazilian-American immigrant, it may be only natural that a key research interest of **Dr. DeAnne K. Messias** is on the way immigration and health relate to each other and how they play out in women’s lives, work, health, and the health of their families.

“Over the past seven years,” she said, “my research has focused primarily on access to cervical cancer screening among recent Latina immigrants and language access to health care in the context of the emerging Latino population in South Carolina.”

An initial study, funded by the National Cancer Institute through the *Redes En Acción* pilot project program, resulted in development of the South Carolina Partnership for Cancer Prevention. A major finding from this study – the lack of understanding of the U.S. health care system among Latinas – led to a subsequent research project titled

Navigating the U.S. Health Care System.

In collaboration with the South Carolina Hispanic/Latino Health Coalition and Partnership for Cancer Prevention, Dr. Messias is currently involved in two community-based research projects focusing on access to cervical and breast cancer screening among limited-English-proficient Latinas.

“In South Carolina we have an emerging Latino population composed primarily of younger, more recent immigrants, many of whom do not yet have a good command of the English language,” she says. “Our local health care services often are not prepared to serve this limited-English-proficient population.”

As a nurse and a researcher, Dr. Messias views every health education and health care encounter as a cross-cultural experience.

“We need evidence-based interventions that facilitate the provision of linguistic and culturally appropriate health education and services to our diverse Latino populations,” she emphasizes. “We also need to enhance the ability of Latinos to access cancer information and services in culturally appropriate ways.”



TRAINING

Alicia Gonzales, MSSW, Buda, Texas

Sharing the passion

For Alicia Gonzales, Director of Leadership Development and Training at the National Center for Farmworker Health (NCFH), being a good trainer requires being a good listener.

“I have gained insight and perspective from all the people I have been fortunate to come into contact with,” says Alicia. “I have learned from their stories, experiences and most importantly from their passion and strong commitment to serve communities in need. As a trainer, facilitator, and health educator, I feel one of my most important roles is to ensure that the stories and the experiences I have heard are shared with others around the country.”

She has worked at NCFH for 11 years in various roles, from designing and delivering health intervention programs related to cancer prevention and control and many other health-related issues, developing low-literacy and culturally



appropriate materials, training lay health workers, and developing and conducting training for health care providers.

In her current role Alicia provides and coordinates a range of leadership and staff development training for health center management and board members and provides orientation to staff on migrant-health-related issues and to other organizations serving the Farmworker populations.

“It is compelling to hear and see that similar issues are occurring throughout the country and that we are not alone in our experiences,” Alicia notes. “At the same time it reinforces for me that the health disparities are still so excessive.

“Through training and leadership development, I am committed to find a medium in which I will use these stories and experiences to influence change at some capacity at a local, state and national level.”

Skin cancer awareness important for Latinos

Of the three major types of skin cancer, melanoma is the most aggressive and serious. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Latinos have the second highest rate of melanoma incidence and death after Caucasians.

The skin is the body’s largest organ and protects against heat and light, injury, and infection. Skin cancer is the most common type of cancer in the United States – about one million skin cancers are diagnosed annually.

Doctors can’t always explain why one person gets cancer and another does not. However, researchers have studied general patterns of cancer in the population to learn what things around us and what things we do in our lives may increase our chance of developing the disease.

Results from skin cancer studies

suggest that excessive exposure to the ultraviolet radiation (UV) from the sun and tanning beds is the most important preventable cause of all skin cancers, including melanoma. You can have fun in the sun, but remember to:

- Reduce your time of exposure to high-intensity UV radiation by seeking shade when the sun is strongest (11 a.m. to 3 p.m.).
- Wear protective clothing, such as long-sleeve shirts, pants, wide-brimmed hats and sunglasses when exposed to sunlight.
- Use adequate amounts of sufficiently protective sunscreen – remember, sunscreen is not a substitute for avoidance of sun exposure.

The National Cancer Institute has valuable information about skin cancer

prevention available on its Web site, www.cancer.gov. [Click here](#) to visit the melanoma homepage or [click here](#) to visit the skin cancer homepage for information on skin cancer causes, prevention and treatment.

In addition, NCI publications such as *You Need to Know about Cancer* and *What You Need to Know about Melanoma* are available online as well as in hard copy.

For cancer information in Spanish, visit [cancer.gov en español](http://cancer.gov/en-espanol). NCI’s Spanish-language Web site has the same general information, but is culturally and linguistically tailored to the Latino population. The site also has an e-mail service available.

To speak with a Cancer Information Specialist in English or Spanish, call 1-800-4-CANCER (1-800-422-6237) 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. local time, Monday through Friday.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Former *Redes* trainee receives NIH appointment

When Peter Prieto was tackling the tasks of an intern in the *Redes En Acción* training program, who could know that his future would hold a three-year National Institutes of Health (NIH) research fellowship?

He's now Dr. Prieto, and five years after his summer in the *Redes* National Network Center, that dream is coming true. In July, he will assume a Clinical Fellowship in the Surgery Branch of the National Cancer Institute, in immunotherapy and surgical oncology.

"Overall, the three-year combined immunotherapy / surgical oncology fellowship will provide mentorship, equip my intellectual development, and catalyze my future as an academic surgical oncologist," he says.

The appointment should come as no surprise to those who have known and worked with Dr. Prieto. Indeed, it's just another step along a path that started, well, as he puts it, at birth.

"Wanting to become a physician was a reflex I think I was born with," he says.

His decision to work in the field of clinical oncology was shaped by a personal trauma in his life. In the spring of his senior year in college, his father was diagnosed with cancer.

After receiving his MD from St. George's University School of Medicine in Grenada, West Indies, he began a General Surgery residency at State University of New York (SUNY) Upstate Medical University in Syracuse, where he is completing his second year.

While in medical school, however, he took a detour to San Antonio, where he combined work on a Master's of Public Health with an internship in the *Redes En Acción* coordinating center office. His summer responsibilities included work on a grant to Susan G. Komen for the Cure and the Hispanic/Latino Genetics Community Consultation Network (HLGCCN) Summit in Washington, DC.

"Peter was one of our many outstanding young men and women who participate in our training opportunities every year," said Amelie G. Ramirez, DrPH, *Redes* Principal Investigator. "He was extremely intelligent, articulate and



Dr. Peter Prieto, right, reviews an X-ray.

diligent. It was readily apparent that he would be very successful in his future career."

After completing his NIH fellowship in 2011, Dr. Prieto plans to return to Syracuse and his surgery residency and ultimately obtain a clinical fellowship in surgical oncology.

"I foresee an academic appointment in a university or government setting," he says, "continuing research within immunotherapy and novel operative techniques against soft tissue tumors, while keeping my public health missions preserved.

"I wish to translate and direct my research and life's work toward underserved populations, giving back a small portion of what was bestowed upon me."

Navigator program

Continued from page 1

feelings about the cancer screening, diagnosis and treatment experience following participation in the study.

The surveys will be part of the research project's process and outcome evaluations. Implementation process evaluation will involve monitoring the navigator's activities and interactions with patients and the health system. Outcome data will be derived from patient clinical records, scheduling information, patient satisfaction survey results and interviews with health care personnel.

Over the past two years, *Redes En Acción* has pilot-tested a separate – but similar – patient navigator project assisting underserved Latinas who use breast and cervical cancer services at two community clinics in San Antonio. Intervention participants have been provided diverse services, such as help with medical appointment scheduling, appointment reminders, transportation, financial aid and additional health information. The project is supported by a grant from the Pfizer Pharmaceutical Group.

"This program has helped patients feel secure that they'll receive treatment



Nurse Practitioner Maria Falkenberg, MSN, RNC, right, oversees activities of patient navigator Sandra Veronica Covarrubias.

they need and won't fall through the cracks in a health care system that otherwise can make them feel lost or confused," said Sandra Veronica Covarrubias, the project's patient navigator. As part of a medical team at the clinic, Covarrubias works under the day-to-day guidance of Nurse

Practitioner Maria Falkenberg, MSN, RNC.

The new, multi-site *Redes* patient navigator program is expected to last 18 months. After a 12-month intervention, researchers plan to devote the remaining six months to data analysis and reporting.

NEW PROJECTS / NUEVOS PROYECTOS

Southwest Region

A Community Research Collaboration Pilot Award from the California Breast Cancer Research Program is supporting an educational program to increase awareness and knowledge regarding clinical trials among Hispanic and African American women in San Diego.

Natasha Riley, MA, Health Promotion Manager of Vista Community Clinic, is Principal Investigator of the project titled *Science Literacy & Breast Cancer Clinical Trials Education*. **Georgia Robins Sadler, BSN, MBA, PhD**, of Moores UCSD Cancer Center, is

the project Co-PI.

The pilot study will educate women about breast cancer clinical trials and the importance of participation. While it will incorporate elements of the National Cancer Institute's cancer education program, its use of a "sisterhood" theme as the foundation is innovative and is expected to appeal to women of all ethnic groups.

If the 18-month pilot project succeeds, a larger study will follow. If the program is effective, it will be made available to other breast cancer researchers and health educators nationwide.

PUBLICATIONS / PUBLICACIONES

Nápoles-Springer AM, Ortíz C, O'Brien H, Díaz-Méndez M. Developing a culturally competent peer support intervention for Spanish-speaking Latinas with breast cancer. *Journal of Immigrant and Minority Health*. 2008 Mar 14 [Epub ahead of print]

Ramirez AG, Vela L, Cigarroa, FG. A model for health professional education in South Texas. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*. 2008; 7(2):183-194. [Click here](#) to view it online.

NOTICIAS: AROUND REDES

Northwest Region

Marynieves Díaz-Méndez, MD, *Redes En Acción* Northwest Region Outreach Coordinator, discussed *Managing Chemotherapy Side Effects* at the recent *Sobrevivir al Cáncer* Coalition Conference in San Mateo, California. Seventy Latino cancer survivors and family members participated in the conference, which was sponsored by the *Sobrevivir al Cáncer* Coalition, *Una Mano Amiga Latina* Cancer Support Group and the Mills-Peninsula Health Center. The *Redes* Northwest Regional Network Center is a member of *Una Mano Amiga Latina* Cancer Support Group and the *Sobrevivir al Cáncer* Coalition, a collaborative group of local and national agencies that provides cancer education workshops in Spanish in the Greater San Francisco Bay Area.

Eliseo Pérez-Stable, MD, *Redes En Acción* Northwest Region Co-Principal Investigator, received the 2008 Society of General Internal Medicine Herbert W. Nickens Award for his



exceptional commitment to cultural diversity in medicine. Dr. Pérez-Stable is Chief of the Division of General Internal Medicine at the University of California, San Francisco. The Herbert W. Nickens Award is given annually to an individual who has made outstanding contributions to promoting justice and diversity in medical education and health care.

The *Redes En Acción* Northwest Regional Network Center recently co-sponsored a seminar titled *Transdisciplinary Research – The Wave of the Future: Health Disparities as an Example* at the University of California, San Francisco (UCSF). David B. Abrams, PhD, Director of the Office of Behavioral and Social Sciences Research in the Office of the Director of the National Institutes of Health, was a featured presenter.

Other co-sponsors were UCSF components, the Medical Effectiveness Research Center for Diverse Populations, Center for Aging in Diverse Communities, Center for Health and Community, and Center on Social Disparities in Health.

Northeast Region

For the 10th consecutive year, Susan G. Komen for the Cure is funding outreach promoted by *Redes En Acción*, the Brooklyn Breast Health Partnership and The Brooklyn Hospital Center (TBHC). **Lucy Perez**, Outreach Coordinator, works in the community educating women about breast and cervical cancer and providing information about free Pap smears and mammograms supported by the Partnership and TBHC.

Jose R. Marti, MD, former *Redes* Co-Principal Investigator for the Northeast Region, continues to represent *Redes En Acción* in media interviews around the country. He recently discussed *Colon Cancer among Hispanics* on the national radio talk program formerly coordinated by **Dr. Elmer Huerta**, who is now President of the American Cancer Society. Dr. Marti also participated in California radio talk programs, providing exposure for *Redes En Acción* program activities and the National Cancer Institute (NCI). The media activities were organized by NCI.



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