



Ponce Health Sciences University- Moffitt Cancer Center Partnership

Spring 2021 Newsletter for the PHSU-MCC Partnership <http://psm-moffitt.org>

The geographic proximity and large Hispanic populations in Florida and Puerto Rico have driven the formation of an academic partnership between the Ponce Health Sciences University (PHSU) and the Moffitt Cancer Center (MCC). The objectives of the Partnership are to build a long-term cancer research infrastructure at the PHSU and increase the participation of the MCC in cancer research and education programs in the Hispanic/Latino population.

The PHSU-MCC U54 Partnership is a grant supported by the National Cancer Institute's Comprehensive Partnership to Advance Cancer Health Equity (CPACHE). It primarily focuses on developing and improving cancer care outcomes for Hispanic cancer patients in Puerto Rico and Florida who are currently underserved with respect to cancer care, personalized medicine, and participation in clinical trials. The Principal Investigators of this partnership are: Dr. Jaime Matta (PHSU, Contact PI), Dr. Kenneth Wright (MCC, Contact PI), Dr. Julie Dutil (PHSU), and Dr. Alvaro Monteiro (MCC).



February 19, 2021 Virtual Charla: Continuing our commitment to provide cancer educational resources to the community, our most recent Salud! event was held virtually. This event focused on COVID-19 vaccination for cancer patients and survivors, and provided an overview of prevention and risk factors (Brenda Ramos, Community Health Educator (CHE)), COVID-19 vaccine recommendations (Dr. Hector Vélez, community physician), and COVID-19 vaccination phases for Puerto Rican citizens (Hector Robles, PR Department of Health). Other panelists included Dr. Idhaliz Flores (Puerto Rico BioBank). With 21 participants during the event, the majority agreed they felt better informed after the charla



This year as we continue to modify our activities due to COVID-19, the MCC Outreach Core hosted virtual events in March on the topic of Genetics aiming to educate the community with an emphasis on youth and medical professionals in training.

March 13, 2021 Virtual Charla: Genetic Counselor Laura Moreno, presented to Ana G. Mendez University maternal nursing students and the community on the importance of Family Health History. This presentation provided vital information on how family members play a role in cancer and what red flags to look for. Additionally, Ms. Moreno provided resources on how to collect family history and what can be done with that information

March 22, 2021 Virtual Charla: Ms. Moreno, presented to Hillsborough Community College Global Health students and the community on Genetics and what factors can lead to an increased risk of cancer. Resources to help decrease risk factors were provided to participants. In addition, information regarding the use of home genetic testing kits, finding a genetic counselor, and how individuals interested in genetics can become more involved in the field of Genetics was also discussed.



April 10, 2021; Hablemos de Cáncer- Auto-cuidado en tiempos de Crisis: Our biennial symposium was held virtually with the collaboration of professionals from Tampa and Ponce. The event focused on self-care during times of crisis, and included more focused discussions on: women’s cancer, men’s cancer, psychology and nutrition. A total of 61 attendees participated in this virtual event. Dr. Julio Jiménez (Psychiatrist) hosted the event while Ms. Brenda Ramos, CHE, Dr. Hector Vélez (Hemato-oncologist), Dr. Alberto Chiappori, (Oncologist), Dr. Gilberto Ruiz-Deyá (Urologist), Dr. Ana Di Marco (Hemato-oncologist), Dr. Hiradith Menéndez (Psychologist) and Ms. Fabiola Figueroa (Nutritionist) emphasized more specific themes according to their specialties. With 34 evaluations completed after the event, most of our community members agreed and understood the importance of prevention and early intervention in cancer. Given the COVID-19 pandemic, virtual events have become an effective alternate educational forum that reaches more diverse populations and has a broader impact in the community. *A special thanks to our sponsors:*



Pilot Project- Using MC1R Genotype to Impact Skin Cancer Risk Behaviors in Hispanic/Latinos (H/L):

An overarching goal of the PHSU-MCC Partnership is to develop research efforts that will lead to improved cancer prevention and outcomes in the Hispanic/Latino (H/L) population. One recent research project was a randomized controlled prevention study conducted among H/L recruited from eight clinics in Tampa and Ponce, PR. In this study, study participants had an equal chance to be assigned to the intervention group or to the control group. Participants in the control group received information in the mail about how to prevent skin cancers. In addition to this prevention information, participants in the intervention group were mailed information about whether they inherited a version of the *MC1R* gene that could increase their risk of developing skin cancers. The *MC1R* gene plays a central role in the production of pigment, which is responsible for the color of the skin and hair. Certain genetic variations are more common in people with red hair, lighter skin complexion, freckles, and an increased sensitivity to sun exposure.

Study participants were provided information about sun-related behaviors and having a skin examination at the time of their enrollment and again at 3 and 9 months. Of the 920 participants, 54% completed the 3-month and 49% the 9-month follow-up questionnaires. Results showed that participants who inherited higher-risk *MC1R* variants and who received the intervention materials were more likely to use sunscreen and obtain a skin examination from a health professional compared to those in the control group, and that receipt of genetic information did not heighten worry about developing skin cancers.

Meet Our Investigators:

Dr. Peter Kanetsky (MCC) and Dr. Brenda Soto (PHSU) are investigators with the PHSU-MCC Partnership who worked together on the research project titled “Using MC1R Genotype to Impact Skin Cancer Risk Behaviors in Hispanic/Latinos (H/L)”. We were able to sit down with them (virtually) to ask them about their research.

Q: What problems did the community face that your research is helping to understand?

A: Skin cancer incidence has increased three-fold since 1974. In addition, people are being diagnosed at later stages of melanoma – the deadliest form of skin cancer – when the cancer is far along in its growth and has possibly even spread to other places in the body. As the number of people being diagnosed with skin cancer increases, more and more H/L are being diagnosed. This is especially important since Puerto Rico is exposed to some of the highest levels of UV radiation in the world.

Q: How will the results of your project impact the community?

A: With this project, participants learned about their own genetic risk for skin cancer, which can help them improve skin cancer prevention behaviors not only for themselves but also for their family.

Q: Has the community responded well to participate in the investigation?

A: The project was well received. Individuals were eager to participate and receive their genetic results. They shared their results with family members and educated other family members about how this could impact them. In addition, participants were looking for signs of skin cancer and used the project information to consult with their physicians.

