



Fall-Winter 2024 Newsletter

<https://www.phsu-moffitt.org/>

About the Partnership

The geographic proximity and large Hispanic populations in Florida and Puerto Rico have driven the formation of an academic partnership between Ponce Health Sciences University and Moffitt Cancer Center. The complementary expertise at both institutions provides a synergistic means of studying the cancer problem in Puerto Ricans and in the Hispanic population in general.

The Partnership's focus is on developing and improving cancer care outcomes for Hispanics in Puerto Rico and Florida by enhancing cancer care, personalized medicine, participation in clinical research, and understanding the underlying basic mechanisms of cancer.

The PHSU-MCC Partnership is supported by a grant from the National Cancer Institute. The Principal Investigators are Dr. Harold Saavedra (PHSU, Contact PI), Dr. Kenneth Wright (MCC, Contact PI), Dr. Guillermo Armaiz-Peña (PHSU), and Dr. Alvaro Monteiro (MCC).

PHSU and Moffitt Competitive Renewal Awarded

Over the past 17 years, the PHSU-MCC Partnership has established joint programs for basic and clinical research, cancer outreach, cancer education and training, and biobanking, building networks of investigators focused on cancer disparities and infrastructure for sustained long-term collaboration. During late summer 2023 the competitive renewal submitted by our PI's was awarded for a new 5-year grant term. This new proposal will help us expand our catchment area to Orlando (in the Florida site) and to the West region of Puerto Rico. The proposal will enhance new full projects, continued education, community engagement as well as expanding our reach for community education in health and cancer disparities.



Cancer Research Undergraduate Program



The Research Education Core has a new undergraduate student component with this grant renewal. The Undergraduate Student Research Immersion Program is a 2-year program for students to participate in year-round mentoring and research experiences combined with intensive summer research immersions at both PHSU and MCC. Participants will be recruited from the University of South Florida (Tampa) and from Ponce Health Science University, Universidad Interamericana, and Pontificia Universidad Católica (Ponce). The first cohort of 8 students (4 at MCC, 4 at PHSU) began their rotations during Summer 2024 and will continue with the program until

Spring 2026. During their first summer session, along with working in cancer research labs, students participated in weekly Scientific Communications Workshops, MCC's Hallmarks of Cancer course, seminars, and career-counseling activities. At the conclusion of the summer, students also presented a short oral presentation of the project they worked on during the summer and will continue to work on year-round. The second summer session will include students participating in the two courses created by the U54 Partnership, the Health Disparities Course and the Genomics Experience which includes a mock molecular tumor board, seminars, and another oral presentation at the end of the session. Our goal is to allow early and extended engagement with cutting-edge cancer research and researchers at this career-defining stage for undergraduate students.

Research Projects

Epigenetic variations associated with aggressiveness and drug resistant in prostate cancer among Puerto Rican men



Carmen Ortiz,
PhD

A study focused on how environmental factors influence gene function, especially some specific changes in DNA. The study will use prostate tumors from Puerto Rican men operated at the San Lucas Hospital and stored in the Puerto Rico Biobank in Ponce Health Sciences University. Changes in cancer cells resistant to treatments will be evaluated to identify important markers related to the acquisition of this type of resistance. This will help understand how cancer cells escape and survive treatments. It will also help in the discovery of molecular markers to identify patients who may develop resistance to treatments.



Jong Park, PhD

Influence of biobehavioral factors on inflammatory responses in ovarian cancer



Guillermo
Armaiz, PhD

This research project will be carried out by studying human data and mouse data. The human studies will take advantage of survey data that has already been collected on feelings of anxiety, depression, and medication taken in women. New measurements will be carried out on the ovarian tumor tissue of women in the studies, who developed ovarian cancer. It will be studied whether the impact of distress on the immune system is less in women who use aspirin. During one of the studies, we will restrain some of the mice to cause distress, inject them with ovarian cancer cells, and then stress them again.



Lauren Peres,
PhD

Encouraging the promotion of cervical cancer screening for Latino trans men among medical students



Alixida Ramos,
PhD

The pilot project will test the effectiveness of an online intervention to improve medical students' competencies for cervical cancer education and screening promotion among Latinx transmasculine individuals. Medical students in Puerto Rico and Tampa will be assigned to one of two groups in which they will take a brief online educational intervention. They will complete questionnaires to assess their knowledge, attitudes and behaviors toward Latinx transmasculine people. Finally, they will participate in a simulated interaction with a standardized patient. We will also examine the acceptability and appropriateness of the intervention with individual interviews.



Matthew
Schabath, PhD

Outreach Core Highlights



During Hispanic Heritage Month, the U54 PHSU-MCC Partnership collaborated with Moffitt Cancer Center's Office of Community Outreach, Engagement and Equity (COEE) on their podcast, Cancer in Our Community/Cáncer en Nuestra Comunidad. Our Community Health Educator (CHE), Brenda Ramos González, MPHE, explains to us what the U54 Partnership is about and the work we do in cancer research and community outreach. The U54 PHSU-MCC Partnership is a collaboration between Moffitt Cancer Center in Tampa and Ponce Health Sciences University to reduce cancer health disparities among Hispanics. As part of its initiatives, U54 PHSU-MCC Partnership focuses on increasing awareness of cancer prevention, early detection, treatment and research among Hispanics. In this episode, **Brenda Ramos** discusses with **Dr. Sarimar Agosto** the unique perspective of educational and research initiatives with Hispanic communities.

Listen to Podcast: <https://lnkd.in/ebXE7bty>