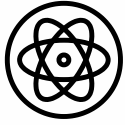


RCMI Newsletter

Volume 1, Issue 2



RCMI Program Grant U54MD007579



RCMI Start Core
New Scholars



RCMI New
Recruits!



Certification
Ceremony of
Class 2021, CEC



Publications

EXTERNAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING



Hilton Ponce Golf & Casino
Resort

November 16-18, 2022

Save the Date!

For more information, contact rcmi@psm.edu



PHSU Bachelor Science in Nursing (BSN) Camp

Students from various cities across Puerto Rico had the opportunity to learn more about the nursing program's academic offer through the Bachelor Science Nursing Camp. During the event, students were divided into groups that rotated through different activities like orientation, campus tour, and workshops. Lubriel Sambolin Escobales (DR. PORTER LAB GRADUATE STUDENT) and María Colón (RCMI brain Core SUPERVISOR) were in charge of offering the "Neuro workshop," where they demonstrated the anatomy of the brain using a preserved specimen (provided by the anatomy laboratory) and explained its functions.

"I was in charge of the Neuro tour, in which the students had access to the Research Building II laboratories, and were told about the research projects, equipment, procedures and opportunities for students interested in other programs."

- Myrella Cruz (Lab Supervisor)



MEET

SHANNALEE R. MARTÍNEZ, Ph.D., (Postdoctoral Fellow)
START Scholar

“ My research focuses on metabolic changes in the tumor microenvironment affecting tumor-immune interactions, cancer cell survival, and drug resistance development. My goal is to translate findings from these studies into improving clinical methods for risk assessment and targeted therapies for patients with prostate cancer. ”

STrategic Academic Research Training

Investigator Development Core

Enhances the scientific diversity in junior faculty scholars.

Meet our new START Scholars



SHANNALEE R. MARTÍNEZ, Ph.D.

School of Medicine
Post-doctoral
Prostate Cancer



LYNNETTE RUIZ ORTIZ, Ph.D.

School of Medicine
Associate Professor
Human Papilloma Virus and Cancer



JENNIFER MORALES CRUZ, Ph.D.

School of Behavioral and Brain Sciences
Assitant Professor
Insomnia and Cancer

PHSU faculty can enroll in START through the following link:



<https://bit.ly/3Ha23en> 🔍



MARIA DEL CARMEN SANCHEZ, Ph.D.

School of Medicine
Associate Professor
Microbiology and Infectious Diseases



NORKA POLANCO FRONTERA, Ph.D.

School of Behavioral and Brain
Sciences
Prostate Cancer
Mental Health-Suicide



PAOLA CARMINELLI CORRETJER, Ph.D.

School of Behavioral and Brain Sciences
Post-Doctoral
Psychology



LAURA DOMENECH, MD

Ponce Medical School Foundation
Senior Medical Officer
Assistant Professor
Pediatrics

Strategic Academic Research Training

RCMI START CORE Pilot Projects 2022-2024



Eliut Rivera-Segarra, Ph.D.

School of Behavioral &
Brain Sciences
Health Disparities

Adapting “Bridges to Better Health and Wellness” for Puerto Ricans Living with Serious Mental Illness

This project has a major public health impact, as it addresses the uptake of primary care services to address diabetes risk among a health disparity population, Latinxs with serious mental illness. This is the first study in Puerto Rico to adapt an intervention addressing multiple levels of the NIMHD Framework.

People living with serious mental illness (PSMI; e.g., schizophrenia, bipolar disorder) die on average 25 years earlier than the general population mostly due to preventable chronic diseases (e.g., diabetes, obesity). This scenario worsens for one Latinx sub-group, Puerto Ricans.



Margarita Bonilla Claudio, DMD, Ph.D.

Dental School
Cancer Periodontal
Diseases

Role of Psychological Distress in Breast Cancer Survivors Periodontal Health

The proposed research is relevant to public health because breast cancer is the most common cancer among women. Moreover, the contribution of altered psychological states on oral health in this population remains unknown.



Caleb Esteban Reyes, Ph.D.

School of Behavioral & Brain
Sciences
Sexual Orientation
Disparities

MIM as Predictor of Chronic Stress, Coming Out Growth and Acceptance among Hispanic LGB Adults

This project aligns with the research project program’s purpose on the focus on the prevention of diseases that disproportionately impact minority populations and, at the same time, address health disparities. In addition, it will promote the development of a new intervention that will directly address the disparities in healthcare outcomes in Puerto Rico.

Recruitment Core

Meet RCMI's recruits!



Normarie Torres-Blasco, Ph.D.

School of Behavioral and Brain Sciences
Cancer & Community

My passion for working with vulnerable populations began by caring for my great-grandmother in her end-of-life process. During this time, I faced the reality that, without appropriate medical and psychosocial care, families may experience burden and patients may suffer more psychological pain at their end of life. As I continued my training in clinical psychology, I realized that my story was similar to those of my

patients. This opened my mind to the need to include families/caregivers as integral members of the end-of-life care process. I carry this experience close to my heart, and want my legacy to show my efforts to give back to my Latinx community and family with a commitment to improve health equity in the Latinx population, particularly in patients and caregivers coping with end-of-life disparities.

In April 2022, I accepted a full-time research appointment as an Assistant Professor in the School of Behavioral and Brain Science (SBBS) and RCMI-Ponce Health Sciences University (PHSU) Specialized Center Health Disparities. The PHSU and RCMI environment has a number of unique features which align well with my career goals. First, the RCMI program has close links with the Community Engagement Core (CEC) that facilitates access to community members' interests in research. In 2022, through the CEC, I started collaborating with cancer community stakeholders. Lastly, Puerto Ricans and other Latinx populations need culturally tailored interventions that address their daily health disparity needs. In southern Puerto Rico, where PHSU is located [AGC1], Latinx patients are more vulnerable due to higher cancer mortality rates, compared to the capital city of San Juan and the United States, and less access to specialized medical services in increasing rural communities. This appointment will allow me to focus my career on this important gap in minority health care research and service.

Recruitment Core

Meet RCMI's recruits!



Marcos J. Ramos Benitez Ph.D.

Basic Sciences

Immunology/Host- Pathogen Interactions

My long-term career goal is to be an independent investigator focused on studying molecular pathogenesis to understand the mechanisms driving severe diseases. Overall, I focus my scientific career on defining the host responses to different infections, primarily by studying the immune system alongside molecular and cell biology. The comprehensive understanding of host-pathogen interaction at a cellular and molecular level directly benefits medical

outcomes by informing treatment courses and novel therapies. Specifically, my research interests rely on the development of comprehensive in-vitro, ex-vivo, and in-vivo models to study those interactions, describe underlying molecular pathogenesis during disease progression, and identify drug targets. My graduate and postdoctoral training provided me with robust experience in multiple biological disciplines, including immunology, microbiology, molecular and cell biology, biochemistry, genetics, virology, and clinical research.

The COVID-19 pandemic shaped my scientific path as an emergent viral infections researcher. Responding to the global emergency, I adapted my research from Ebola Virus Disease to study the molecular pathogenesis of COVID-19 from three main aspects: 1) uncovering the role of neutrophils; 2) investigating the molecular biology and tissue tropism of SARS-CoV-2; and 3) co-leading the basic science component of clinical trials. To date, I have authored 14 publications (6 as first author and 8 as a co-author). Also, I was awarded with a highly competitive position in the postdoctoral research associate training (PRAT) program (grant # 1F12GM137804-01). Diversity and inclusion are essential components in my career as a Hispanic first-generation scientist. I am committed to use my available resources, network, and research program to enable opportunities for underrepresented minority (URM) students in science. Therefore, I decided to transform my ideas into a plan that merges my experiences, resources, and network to ensure that students who come from similar places could use my journey as a learning process and facilitate their own path. In early 2020, I founded "Ciencia en Tus Manos, Inc" (Science in Your Hands), a 501 (c) (3) nonprofit organization dedicated to education and scientific communication for the Hispanic community.



Community Training Institute for Health Disparities by Community Engagement Core

First Graduation Ceremony

On February 25, the First Graduation Ceremony of the Community Training Institute for Health Disparities (CTIHD) under PHSU-RCMI was held in person. Eighteen community leaders from southern area of Puerto Rico graduated. They were certified by PHSU for completing the Community Researchers or Community Health Promoters Program.



By: Dorimar Rodríguez

The ceremony was presided over by Dr. Julio Jiménez, Professor and Director of the CTIHD. He thanked all the team members who collaborated in the development of the Program and all the graduates. Following the agenda of the activity, the graduate Mrs. María del Carmen Pacheco addressed everyone with an emotional reflection. She stated: "how good it feels to see everyone, see them united," alluding to the fact that they did not have the opportunity to mingle in person as all the classes were virtual due to the pandemic. On the other hand, Dr. José Torres, PHSU Chancellor, participated remotely in the ceremony and recognized the effort of all our graduates, emphasizing how community service is one of the fundamental missions of PHSU. He also mentioned how direct contact between researchers and community members is vital, since they are the ones that comprehend the problems, situations, or issues that affect the communities; "At PHSU, community members are considered collaborators or colleagues, as they are an essential part of the investigation." Dr. Kenira Thompson, PRI President and PHSU VP of Research, addressed those present about the fundamentals of empowering communities and how they help reduce Health Disparities.

The keynote speaker for the CTIHD Graduation Ceremony was Dr. Lydia Santiago, Ph.D. in Social Psychology, who has over thirty years of experience in academia. The presence of Dr. Santiago brought joy to our graduates, since she was part of the faculty of both the Community Researchers and Community Health Promoters Program, and they had not had the opportunity to meet her in person.

The most anticipated moment of the night was the bestowing of certifications and awards to the graduates. Dr. Julio Jiménez,

Kenira Thompson, and Dr. Elizabeth Rivera (Dean of Academic Affairs) conferred the certificates and trophies. The first cohort of the Community Researchers Program had ten talented women, leaders of their communities from the municipalities of Patillas, Guayama, Villalba, Ponce, Peñuelas, and Yauco. Meanwhile, the Community Health Promoters Program had eight Community Leaders from the municipalities of Lajas, Sabana Grande, Ponce, Coamo, Santa Isabel, and Guayama. All of them completed their programs; in the group of researchers, they made a Research Proposal as a team after completing six didactic courses. After completing two didactic courses in the group of promoters, they created educational plans that were implemented in different communities.

Although they have already completed their student phase at the Institute, all graduates will always be part of the #PHSUFamily.



Publications



Cultural Adaptation of Meaning-Centered Psychotherapy for Latino Families: A protocol

Normarie Torres-Blasco, Ph.D.

School of Behavioral and Brain Sciences
Cancer & Community



Eliut Rivera-Segarra, Ph.D.

School of Behavioral & Brain Sciences
Health Disparities

Global mental health research and practice: a decolonial approach



Cristina Peña-Vargas, PsyD

School of Behavioral & Brain Sciences
Health Disparities

Impact of Seismic Activity on Access to Health Care in Hispanic/Latino Cancer Patients from Puerto Rico



Luisa I. Alvarado-Domenech, MD

POPZE II Project Lead
Ponce Research Institute

Early childhood neurodevelopmental outcomes in children with prenatal Zika virus exposure: a cohort study in Puerto Rico

Announcements

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