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Commentary

Transcending Language and Other Barriers to Boost Clinical Trial Participation

By Eneida Nemecek, MD, MS, MBA



Eneida Nemecek, MD, MS, MBA, is associate director for clinical research at the OHSU Knight Cancer Institute and a member of AACI's Clinical Research Innovation (CRI) Steering Committee.

Commentary Overview

- Although Hispanic/Latino individuals account for 19.5 percent of the U.S. population, this group experiences a higher cancer burden due to delayed diagnosis, barriers to care, and other factors.
- With support from the Genentech Foundation Health Equity Innovation Fund, OHSU Knight Cancer Institute launched a project to increase engagement and participation of the Hispanic/Latino community in cancer clinical trials.
- As part of the project, Knight Cancer Institute gathered community feedback, developed educational videos in Spanish and English, and engaged the services of a dedicated navigator to support Hispanic/Latino patients.

The Hispanic population is one of the fastest growing groups—and the second largest—in the United States, accounting for 19.5 percent of the U.S. population. It is also a highly diverse ethnic group, encompassing a wide range of races, religions, languages, countries of origin, and cultural identities. Although the incidence of cancer is not higher in the Hispanic/Latino population, the burden of cancer experienced by this group is higher due to delays in diagnosis, barriers to access to care, socioeconomic factors, morbidity, recurrence, and mortality. Another challenge comes in the form of access to clinical trials, with only about 5 percent participation. These disparities are multifactorial

and heavily influenced by systemic inequities and discrimination.

Hispanic/Latino individuals are community members in all U.S. states and territories, and as such, they need equitable access to the care and research opportunities provided across all cancer centers in the country. But reaching our cancer centers can pose a challenge for many members of the community for a variety of reasons.

The OHSU Knight Cancer Institute is the only NCI-Designated Comprehensive Cancer Center in the state of Oregon. About 15 percent of the population in our catchment area identifies as Hispanic/Latino. In 2022, our team was awarded a grant from the Genentech Foundation Health Equity Innovation Fund to support **Proyecto Mi Opción**, a project to develop strategies to increase engagement and participation of the Hispanic/Latino community in cancer clinical trials.



Proyecto Mi Opción participants with Dr. Nemecek

As part of this project, we implemented three sequential initiatives. The first initiative consisted of conducting community conversation forums with stakeholders from the Hispanic/Latino community across our region to identify knowledge gaps, perceived barriers, and potential opportunities to increase clinical trial participation. Lessons learned from these conversations were used to create and launch the second initiative, a series of educational videos tailored to the Hispanic/Latino community, developed in partnership with Elemento Latino, a Latino-owned media company.

The 18 short videos cover a variety of topics identified by the community as important to them, including information about the most common cancers and general topics about cancer care and support. The videos are available for public access on YouTube, free of branding, and closed captioned in Spanish and English. They feature Hispanic/Latino health care professionals, community educators, and medical student representatives from the Latino Medical Student Association. As the third initiative, we have recently recruited a dedicated navigator to support Hispanic/Latino patients referred to our center for cancer care.



Behind the scenes of a Mi Opción educational video

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Although it is early to measure the sustained impact of this project, enrollment of Hispanic/Latino participants in interventional cancer clinical trials one year after implementation rose from 5 to 9 percent.

We are hopeful the educational resources we have created with the **Mi Opción** project will be useful to other cancer centers, and that our project will serve as a template for similar initiatives beyond our local community and for other underserved communities. We all have a role and responsibility to improve access to cancer care and research for all members of our communities beyond socioeconomic and other barriers. Collaboration across cancer centers and with our community partners is key to achieve this goal.

Our Mission

The Association of American Cancer Institutes (AACI) represents over 100 premier academic and freestanding cancer centers in the United States and Canada. AACI is accelerating progress against cancer by enhancing the impact of academic cancer centers and promoting cancer health equity.

About AACI Commentary

To promote the work of its members, AACI publishes *Commentary*, a monthly editorial series focusing on major issues of common interest to North American cancer centers, authored by cancer center leaders and subject matter experts.

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