

from the National Cancer Institute

Diversifying the Ranks of Cancer Researchers To Help Reduce Cancer Disparities

By the National Cancer Institute

Somewhere in a research laboratory, a Hispanic scientist is testing tissue samples to better understand how colorectal cancer starts. In another research facility, a Hispanic researcher who immigrated to this country a few years ago is taking a break from a laboratory project to talk with colleagues about culturally appropriate ways to encourage more Hispanic men to participate in a prostate cancer clinical trial.

As the research community invests more resources into investigating cancer and other health disparities, improving diversity in the research ranks is critical. Underrepresented researchers bring more to the table than education and training credentials. Researchers from underserved communities can help educate and interest patients from their respective communities in cancer clinical trials. They can also provide cultural insight that other researchers may not have. For example, a Hispanic researcher who is a native of a Latin American country can relate to the language challenges that Hispanics may confront in their experience with the health care system.

Yet, the shortage of underrepresented investigators in biomedical research labs is pronounced. Between 2000 and 2008, Hispanics earned just 2,400 of the 82,000 doctoral degrees in biology, chemistry, and physics awarded by U.S. institutions, according to the National Science Foundation.

The National Cancer Institute (NCI) is opening doors for Hispanics and others from underserved communities to join the cancer research enterprise. Through two key programs, NCI aims to encourage more researchers from underserved communities to join the field and to prepare underrepresented scientists for the rigors of a research career.

The Continuing Umbrella of Research Experiences (CURE) program provides training and career development opportunities to researchers as young as high school students all the way up to

junior investigators. The program helps researchers enhance their skills and opportunities through formal networking and mentoring, and it provides a range of funding opportunities for CURE participants.

NCI's <u>Partnership to Advance Cancer Health Equity</u> (PACHE) program offers intensive training opportunities for participants by fostering partnerships between NCI-designated cancer centers and academic institutions that provide services to racially and ethnically diverse or underserved communities. The PACHE program has a total of 17 partnership sites.

Both CURE and PACHE are run by the NCI Center to Reduce Cancer Health Disparities. The center was created in 2001 to reduce the unequal burden of cancer in our society and train the next generation of competitive researchers in cancer and cancer health disparities research.

The commitment to enhance diversity in biomedical research also extends to the National Institutes of Health (NIH), NCI's parent agency. NIH is working to increase the ranks of researchers from underserved communities and to enhance opportunities for more researchers of color to obtain research funding through a Workforce. The group presented a plan of action in August 2011 that called for investing more than \$500 million in programs over the next decade to encourage more underrepresented individuals to become biomedical scientists.

NCI has a growing cadre of researchers from underserved communities who are leading the way in helping the cancer research community address cancer disparities. You can learn more by reading the *Lifelines®* profiles of Drs. Jorge Gomez and Tanya Agurs-Collins here.

NCI leads the National Cancer Program and the NIH effort to dramatically reduce the burden of cancer and improve the lives of cancer patients and their families, through research into prevention and cancer biology, the development of new interventions, and the training and mentoring of new researchers. For more information about cancer, please visit the NCI web site at www.cancer.gov/espanol or call NCI's Cancer Information Service at 1-800-4-CANCER (1-800-422-6237). More articles and videos in the culturally relevant Lifelines series are available at http://www.cancer.gov/espanol/lifelines