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Recommended Citation

Georgia Southern University, "Newsroom" (2012). *Newsroom*. 992.
<https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/newsroom/992>

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Jiann-Ping Hsu College of Public Health Receives \$297,000 National Institutes of Health Grant to Support Cervical Cancer Education Program

SEPTEMBER 26, 2012

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Georgia Southern University's Jiann-Ping Hsu College of Public Health has been awarded a \$297,185 federal grant from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to refine and test a cervical cancer education program in the Hispanic/Latino community.

The two-year project, which is funded by the National Institutes of Health Office of the Director, Office of Behavioral and Social Sciences Research, is titled, "*Salud es Vida* (Health is Life): Reducing Access Barriers to Cervical Cancer Screening among Underserved Hispanic Women." John Luque, Ph.D., assistant professor of community health, is the principal investigator of the new grant.

As a part of the grant, Georgia Southern researchers are partnering with Georgia Health Sciences University's Gynecological Cancer Prevention Center and Department of Medical Illustration. In a previous NIH pilot grant, Luque's team developed a Spanish language cervical cancer screening toolkit that helps community health workers to encourage women to receive Pap tests and also provides information about the human papilloma virus (HPV) vaccine, which prevents cervical cancer. This new grant will test the efficacy of this intervention approach.

According to statistics provided by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control, Hispanic women have the highest rates of cervical cancer of all racial/ethnic groups in the United States. Hispanic women are also more likely to die from cervical cancer than non-Hispanic whites. There are several reasons why cervical cancer rates are much higher in this segment of the population, one being that Hispanic women, especially newer immigrants, are less likely to receive regular Pap tests. In addition, recent changes in Pap test guidelines issued by the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force, recommend that women receive Pap tests only every three years beginning at age 21, so women need more information about recent changes in cervical cancer screening guidelines. Other professional groups have recommended that outreach be targeted at medically underserved women who have never received screening.

"In rural Georgia, there are numerous barriers to regular screening including shortage of providers, transportation challenges and burdensome costs for uninsured patients," says Luque.

In order to increase information about access to cervical cancer screening, Luque is partnering with the Southeast Georgia Communities Project (SEGCP), a non-profit organization directed by Andrea Hinojosa in Lyons, Ga. The community health workers (or promotoras in Spanish) will have the educational tools to deliver this information to their fellow community members to join the fight against cancer health disparities.

The 2011 Department of Health and Human Services "Action Plan to Reduce Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities" specifically calls for supporting more training of community health workers, such as promotoras, as one of its action steps to reduce disparities.

"The hope is that this study will add to the evidence base for how important a community health worker can be in making sure that underserved women receive routine, yet often lifesaving, Pap tests," said Luque. "Promotoras typically volunteer to work with women in low-income areas who often do not have adequate access to preventative health care. This study will demonstrate how researchers can partner with community partners and promotoras in a rural area to refine and test a cervical cancer education and outreach toolkit to reduce cancer health disparities."

Luque says the study may help community health programs and clinics realize the value of community health workers as they plan cervical cancer outreach programs for Hispanic women.

Georgia Southern University, a Carnegie Doctoral/Research University founded in 1906, offers more than 120 degree programs serving more than 20,000 students. Through eight colleges, the University offers bachelor's, master's and doctoral degree programs built on more than a century of academic achievement. In 2012, the University was named one of the Top 10 most popular universities in the country by U.S. News & World Report and is a top choice of Georgia's HOPE scholars. Georgia Southern is recognized for its student-centered approach to education. Visit: www.georgiasouthern.edu.

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