

Dr. Estelamari Rodríguez honored as GRACE Patient Educator of the Year

BY SANDY VAN

Estelamari Rodríguez, MD, MPH, is the recipient of the Patient Educator of the Year award from Cancer GRACE (Global Resource for Advancing Cancer Education). The award was presented May 31 in Chicago in recognition of Rodríguez's work in breaking down language barriers around the world by creating Spanish-language educational content about lung cancer for patients and caregivers.

As a physician and a Latina, Rodríguez, a bilingual thoracic oncologist at Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center, part of the University of Miami Health System, has seen firsthand the ways that language barriers often prevent Spanish-speaking patients from receiving optimal care.

Since 2020, she has created Spanish-language video content and seminars for GRACE. She has covered a wide range of lung cancer topics, including advances in targeted therapies and the newest research on biomarker testing, immunotherapy and emerging therapies. Her goal is to provide information that will help Spanish-speaking lung cancer patients communicate their concerns to healthcare providers and make better treatment decisions for themselves.

"It is a great honor to receive this award from the GRACE patient advocacy group," Rodríguez said. "Educated patients are the best self-advocates."

GRACE has presented the Patient Edu-

lator of the Year award annually since 2018. It recognizes an oncologist who has gone above and beyond in educating and empowering patients with cancer.

"We chose Dr. Rodríguez because she exemplifies our mission of providing accurate and reliable cancer education to patients and their advocates," said GRACE program manager Maria Christian. "She tries to participate in our recorded video libraries and live events as often as possible, and if she's unable to work it into her schedule, then she will personally record a presentation on her own time and send it to GRACE for publication."

A DRIVING FORCE IN MULTIDISCIPLINARY TREATMENT OF LUNG CANCER

Rodríguez is a triple board-certified hematologist and oncologist who helped establish the multidisciplinary lung cancer care approach at Sylvester, South Florida's only National Cancer Institute-designated center. The multidisciplinary approach incorporates clinicians from outside of oncology, creating a team that with patients from initial screening through diagnosis, treatment and support.

Rodríguez also is a driving force behind Sylvester's lung cancer screening program and has a particular interest in treating malignant mesothelioma. With a Sylvester at Aventura office location, she treats patients from both Miami-Dade and Broward counties.

Throughout her career, Rodríguez, who also holds a master's degree in public health, has advocated for health equity. She is an active member of the ECOG/ACRIN Cancer Research Group Health Equity Committee and a mentor of the American Society of Clinical Oncology's Virtual Diversity Mentoring Program for minority medical students and fellows. Her published research has included studying methods to reduce disparities in mesothelioma outcomes, particularly disparities related to social determinants of health, such as age, gender, race and income.

THE UNIQUE PERSPECTIVE OF A LATINA ONCOLOGIST

Rodríguez uses her unique perspective as a Latina physician – only 2.4 percent of physicians in the U.S. are Latina – to improve outcomes and care for all of her patients.

"I have witnessed in my own family from Puerto Rico and in my medical training how our Spanish-speaking patients and caregivers are sometimes left out of the physician-patient conversation," she said. "Many patients in our Latinx community are receiving suboptimal care because of lack of access and education about treatment options, risks and benefits and alternative treatments."

Rodríguez also noted that caregivers and family members often play an integral role



Estelamari Rodríguez, MD

as members of the treatment team for Hispanic patients, which is why she makes an extra effort to speak to them, as well as to patients, in her videos and seminars.

GRACE's Christian praised the quality of Rodríguez's content and her understanding of how to communicate to overwhelmed caregivers and patients – by being factual, professional and personable. Christian also underscored the importance of Rodríguez's Spanish-language material, which, she noted, reaches "a vulnerable population that too often find a lack of materials when searching for information."

Villagers Support 113-year-old home of Miami Hispanic Ballet

BY KAREN F. BUCHSBAUM

The Villagers, Miami's oldest preservation organization, recently awarded \$10,000 to the Miami Hispanic Ballet for work completed to repair the foundation and subfloor of their historic residence.

The historic Warner House, built in 1911, is the home of the Miami Hispanic Ballet and hosts a variety of cultural programs. The space is utilized for ballet performance rehearsals and visiting ballet students from around the world, as well as theater companies, art exhibits, and ballet lessons for children in the surrounding community.

Local pioneers James and Susan Warner and their family arrived in Miami for him to work in accounting with Henry Flagler. The family founded the very successful Miami Floral Company, the first florist in the area. Having experienced the 1906 hurricane, they wanted a home built to withstand future storms and used reinforced concrete under the direction of architect George L Pfeiffer. The 22-bedroom home was built on an elevation with 16-inch walls and modern electricity and indoor plumbing, unique for the time.

"The Villagers members were instrumental in saving the Warner House from demolition in 1980 and we continue our commitment to preserving this important part of Miami's early history," said Kelley Schild, Villagers president.

In order to save the impressive Neo-



The Villagers present a \$10,000 grant to the Miami Hispanic Ballet. Pictured (l-r) are Villagers Gina Guilford and Paula Volpe; Eriberto Jimenez, executive artistic director of the Miami Hispanic Ballet, and Villagers president Kelley Schild.

Classical structure, the home was purchased in the 1980s by Villagers Dolly McIntyre and Sallye Jude in partnership with Tim Blake and Maggie Wood. The group maintained the building for more than two decades, investing money to modernize and restore it and eventually leasing interior office space. In 1983 the

building was awarded a spot on the National Register of Historic Places.

The Miami-Dade County Cultural Affairs Council gave a grant to the Miami Hispanic Ballet in 2009 to help purchase a permanent home. Meticulous restoration and maintenance have returned the historic building to its former impressive status.

Through educating, advocating, fundraising, restoration, and documentation The Villagers work to preserve the cultural and architectural heritage of local historic sites and neighborhoods. For information about membership opportunities, and the full scope of The Villagers' 58-year legacy, visit www.thevillagersinc.org.