



SWOG Latin America Initiative NEWSLETTER

SWOG CANCER RESEARCH NETWORK

THE HOPE FOUNDATION FOR CANCER RESEARCH

Strengthening Relationships for Latino Patients with Cancer

VOLUME THREE | ISSUE ONE | WINTER 2024

LETTER FROM THE SWOG EXECUTIVE OFFICER FOR INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

Dear Readers,

We want to extend our appreciation for your interest in the recent undertakings and forthcoming initiatives of the SWOG Latin America Initiative (SLAI). As we embark on 2024 with enthusiasm, we are equally delighted to recount some of our notable achievements since the publication of our last newsletter.

During the SWOG fall meeting in Chicago, we hosted a remarkably successful symposium welcoming US and Latin American investigators.

The hybrid meeting format allowed members of our international research teams to join

remotely. The overarching theme was tobacco control and its nexus to smoking-related cancers in Latin America. This thematic focus underscores our commitment to highlighting pressing public health challenges and fostering collaborative endeavors to combat cancer within the region. Dr. Joaquin Barnoya discussed tobacco control in context of new tobacco products and related public health challenges in Latin America, and we had other lectures outlining smoking-related cancers in the region.



Chavez Mac Gregor

One of our long-time supporters, Dr. Irene Tamí-Maury, discussed her work related to smoking cessation strategies using digital tools. As part of our symposium tradition, we highlight one SWOG site, this time the Instituto Nacional de Enfermedades Neoplásicas (INEN) in Lima, Perú. If this sparked your interest, you will find articles related to some of these topics in this newsletter.

One of our flagship endeavors revolves around the organization of an annual research course. At the end of November, in partnership with the Instituto Nacional de Cancerología (NCI) in Bogotá, Colombia, we held a three-day hybrid conference dedicated to infection-related cancers, an area of growing importance in oncology research. The conference also served to celebrate the 10-year anniversary of the collaboration between SWOG and the NCI-Colombia. We had the opportunity to hear extraordinary lectures delivered by distinguished SWOG investigators, eminent local experts, and esteemed guests representing the American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) and the US National Cancer Institute (NCI). While

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SLAI UPDATES

You may have heard that it has been a very good year for SWOG, but it has also been a very good year for the SLAI! At this time, there are a record number of SWOG protocols open at a record number of SWOG member sites in Latin America. As you can see from the table below, five countries are enrolling to four different protocols.

The SLAI has also had the pleasure of engaging in discussion about scientific collaborations with the Adolescent and Young Adult and the GI Committees. Currently, most ideas are still in the exploratory phase, but we will share more information with you once some of these ideas come to fruition.

CURRENT LIST OF OPEN SWOG STUDIES AT SLAI INSTITUTIONS

Study	Activated	In activation process
S1501		Chile
S1703		Chile, Mexico, Uruguay, Peru
S1802	Chile, Colombia, Mexico	
S1827	Chile, Colombia, Mexico	
S2010	Chile, Mexico, Peru	Uruguay
S2013	Chile, Mexico, Uruguay	Mexico
S2104		Pending revision allowing participation: Colombia, Mexico, Uruguay
EA1151		Chile, Colombia, Uruguay
EA2197		Chile, Mexico
EA8134		Colombia
HN009		Mexico
GY019		Chile, Mexico, Peru, Uruguay

SLAI INVESTIGATOR UPDATES:

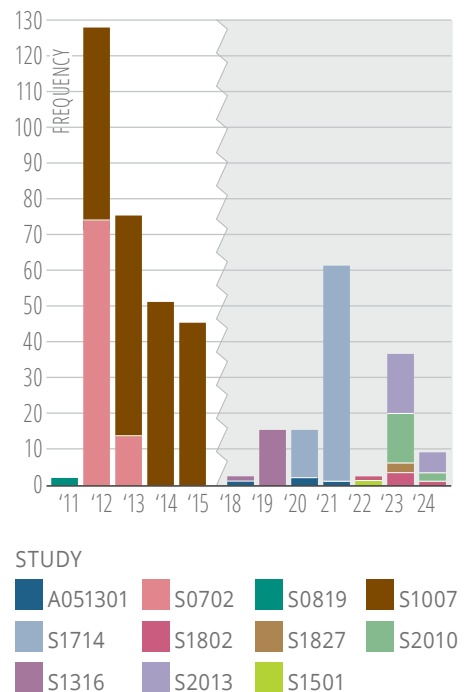
Dr. Taiane Rebellato at LACOG, the SWOG member site in Brazil, attended the Early-Stage Investigator Training Course in Seattle in September 2023. She worked with SWOG mentees on developing a proposal titled "A single-arm phase II trial of Datopotamab deruxtecan (Dato-DXd) plus Durvalumab as first line treatment for patients with advanced/metastatic penile cancer." The SLAI coordinating team is currently reviewing future SLAI investigator proposals for the 2024 Early-Stage Investigator Training Course.



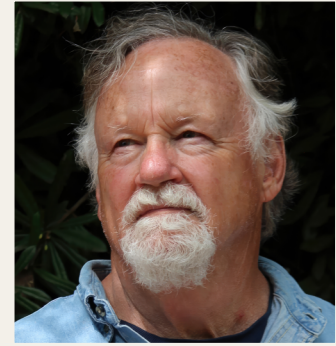
Dr. Javier Retamales at GOCCHI, the SWOG member site in Chile, has been actively identifying funding for proposals of populational relevance in Latin America. In December, he submitted two SEED grant proposals to The Hope Foundation: one on probiotics after surgery and another one for a pilot study using technology to simplify ePRO submission for caregivers during end-of-life care. Although he does not know whether those two projects will be funded, another proposal, "Pattern of care of metastatic breast cancer in five Latin American Countries," was the successful winner of the Conquer Cancer® Grant from ASCO and Pfizer. Given the scope of collaboration required for this multi-centric proposal, we anticipate Dr. Retamales will be very busy!



ACCUAL TO NCI STUDIES BY SLAI INSTITUTIONS



Every project has an origin story. Most of our memories of the SLAI at SWOG and CRAB begin with **Dr. Crowley**, CRAB co-founder and one of the early visionaries for the SLAI. In this column, Dr. Crowley shares his story about how SLAI came to be. In **part one**, he related how collaborations in Latin America took root in SWOG; in **part two**, he continued his story with the first collaborations in gastric cancer; in **part three**, he took us through the creation of the SLAI as a formal initiative. In this fourth and final part, Dr. Crowley outlines elements of the SLAI program that have become building blocks for SWOG's collaboration with Latin America.



THE STORY OF THE SWOG LATIN AMERICA INITIATIVE

PART FOUR: TOWARD SUSTAINABILITY

As we entered the second decade of the SLAI, planning began for the third research conference, to be held in Chile in November 2019. However, unrest in the streets of Santiago caused us to postpone the conference until the spring of 2020, by which time, of course, COVID-19 shut down travel and meetings across the globe. We thus switched to a virtual format for the “Santiago” conference in November 2020. Although this sacrificed the important face-to-face component, it allowed us to reach a much larger audience through Zoom. We took advantage of wonderful back room support from CRAB to make the conference a success. A second virtual conference, with the Instituto Nacional de Cancerología in Mexico (or INCa, the Mexican NCI) as the host, took place in April of 2021. By November of 2022, we were ready to travel again, and a hybrid conference focusing on cancer control research took place in Montevideo, Uruguay.

These conferences are of utmost importance to the SLAI, because they focus on issues unique to the continent and promote scientific discussions for studies of interest in the region and in SWOG. The Hope Foundation has provided support for all SLAI training and scientific collaboration conferences, but we also received an R13 through the

NIH's Center for Global Health, which helped support the 2020 and 2021 virtual conferences.

In September 2021, Mariana Chavez MacGregor of MD Anderson, by way of Mexico, replaced Alejandro Mohar as SWOG Executive Officer for International Affairs. Dacia Christin, originally hired as a temporary conference moderator

for the virtual conferences, became the SLAI Project Manager. Their involvement brought about some changes. Some of these included increasingly formalizing some internal processes for international participation, increasing SLAI engagement with SWOG scientific committees, organizing a SLAI Strategic Retreat which outlined SLAI and SWOG leadership's vision and objectives for the program, opening up the Latin America symposium to all attendees during the SWOG group meeting, and initiating this biannual SLAI newsletter.

With all of our support, the SLAI is working to help shape the future of SWOG—one where international collaborations contribute to reducing global cancer disparities, improving patients' lives, and one day, eliminating cancer for all.

SPOTLIGHT ON PERU

At the Latin American symposium during the SWOG fall group meeting, we took an in-depth look at the Instituto Nacional de Enfermedades Neoplásicas (in English, National Institute of Neoplastic Diseases, often referred to as INEN).

As the lead oncological institution in Peru, the institute manages a cancer hospital, coordinates national and international research collaborations, educates future oncological health professionals, and leads Plan Esperanza, the national cancer control plan (teaser: if you attend the Latin America symposium in the spring, you will learn more about their national plan!). They attend to all cancer pathologies, with the most frequent tumors being



prostate, cervix, breast, stomach, and colon.

INEN has phase two, three, and four clinical trial experience

in pharmaceutical trials. After becoming a SWOG member in 2013, they recruited successfully to S1316 (5 patients enrolled). Since opening S2010 in May 2023, they have registered 12 patients. INEN also hopes to activate S1703, GY019, EA1151, and EA2185.

The process for activating a clinical

trial at INEN is relatively straight forward: a scientific committee first reviews the protocol for feasibility and relevance and then their ethics committee reviews it. If there are no major hurdles, this site could activate a protocol (once it is translated into Spanish) within a month or two! That said, the list of drugs approved nationally is much smaller than in the US, and national regulations require drug intervention trials to be covered by civil liability insurance. While this limits some of the US cooperative group protocols they can participate in, translational, epidemiological, and observational studies promise greatest success.

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LETTER FROM PAGE 1

formal lectures took center stage during the mornings, simultaneous hands-on workshops took place in the afternoons, focusing on crucial aspects of research and study design. On the culminating day, a dedicated workshop convened to discuss pre-selected research proposals, allowing investigators to present proposals of regional relevance and receive real-time feedback from SWOG and local experts. The symposium, as a whole, epitomizes our commitment to fostering knowledge exchange

and catalyzing collaborative research in the fight against cancer.

As we look towards the future, our aspiration is to elevate the presence and engagement of Latin American investigators within SWOG committees. We extend a warm and inclusive invitation to all SWOG members to acquaint themselves with our initiative, a gateway to a multitude of collaborative opportunities. These opportunities are not confined to the activation of clinical trials alone but include mentoring experiences and the cultivation of bidirectional

academic relationships. The entire SLAI team remains deeply appreciative of SWOG leadership's steadfast support in advancing this pivotal initiative and their unwavering guidance as we navigate the exciting and transformative terrain of global oncology.

Gracias,

A handwritten signature in purple ink that reads "Mariana".

Mariana Chavez Mac Gregor, MD, MS

**WANT TO
LEARN
MORE?**

You are invited to attend the SLAI symposium we host at each group meeting! To view the fall 2023 symposium and learn more about SLAI institutions' participation in SWOG, we hope you will watch the recorded meeting here:

[SWOG Fall 2023 Hybrid Group Meeting: SWOG Latin America Initiative Symposium - YouTube](#)

Many cancer deaths can be prevented, and some cancers could be avoided completely. This is especially true for cancers caused by infectious agents. **Dr. Rolando Herrero** has dedicated his career to studying these cancers, most notably the human papilloma virus. As current scientific director of the Agencia Costarricense de Investigaciones Biomédicas, Fundación INCIENSA in Costa Rica and former head of the Early Detection and Prevention Section at the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), he chaired the working group for cancers caused by infections for the first edition of the Latin America and the Caribbean Code Against Cancer. The IARC and Pan American Health Organization coordinated the code. Below is an abstract printed in *Cancer Epidemiology* in October 2023 which outlines some of the Latin America and the Caribbean.



THE FIRST EDITION OF THE LATIN AMERICAN CODE AGAINST CANCER: CANCERS ASSOCIATED WITH INFECTIONS

About 13% of all cancers around the world are associated with infectious agents, particularly in low-resource settings.

The main infectious agents associated with cancer are *Helicobacter pylori* (*H. pylori*), that causes gastric cancer; human papillomavirus (HPV) that causes cervical, vulvar, vaginal, penile, anal, and oropharyngeal cancer; hepatitis B and C viruses that cause liver cancer; and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), associated with cancers of the cervix, Kaposi sarcoma (KS), and non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. In Latin

America and the Caribbean (LAC), about 150,000 cancer cases are caused annually by infections. The LAC Cancer Code Against Cancer consists of a set of 17 evidence-based and individual-level cancer prevention recommendations targeted to the general population, suited to the epidemiological, socioeconomic, and cultural conditions of the region, and tailored to the availability and accessibility of health-care systems.

The recommendations with respect to infection-driven malignancies include testing and treating for *H. pylori* in the context of specific public health programs, vaccination against HPV and hepatitis B Virus (HBV) and detection and treatment of chronic infections with HBV, hepatitis C virus (HCV), and HIV, in addition to the promotion of safe sex and use of condoms to prevent sexually transmitted infections (STI). Countries, policy makers, health care systems, and individuals should consider the adoption of these recommendations to help reduce the incidence and mortality of infection-related cancers in LAC, to improve quality of life of individuals and reduce the costs of cancer care in the region.

WANT TO
LEARN
MORE?

THE FULL ARTICLE IS AVAILABLE FROM:

Herrero R, Carvajal LJ, Camargo MC, et al. Latin American and the Caribbean Code Against Cancer 1st edition: Infections and cancer. *Cancer Epidemiol.* 2023;86 Suppl 1:102435. Available from: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/37852729/> doi:10.1016/j.canep.2023.102435

EXPLORING GLOBAL PARTNERSHIPS: THE SLAI AND SWOG'S AYA COMMITTEE

The **Adolescent and Young Adult (AYA)** Committee chair and co-chair, Drs. Rebecca Johnson and Lucia Nappi, contacted the SLAI before the fall group meeting in 2023 to express interest in engaging with Latin American SWOG investigators and spotlighting international collaborations during their committee meeting. SLAI investigators from Chile, Peru, and Brazil were represented!

Dr. Elysia Alvarez, a pediatric oncologist from UC Davis Comprehensive Cancer Center, presented her research on the global burden of disease in the AYA population and AYA cancer care in Latin America. In the U.S., the NCI definition for AYA populations is generally used, encompassing ages 15 to 39, whereas some Latin American countries define AYA populations as 24 or even younger. While cancer institutions typically

treat older AYA populations, pediatric hospitals often handle younger AYA populations, limiting cancer institutions' access to these young patients. However, given the U.S. AYA age definition spans older ages than that of certain countries, these institutions may actually have access to this patient population. It is crucial to emphasize this age variation when discussing AYA studies internationally, as their definition may be different and it

influences access to these populations.

The SLAI is always on the look out for more studies that might be beneficial to patients in Latin America. If your committee is interested in exploring collaborations with the SLAI, please reach out to Dr. Mariana Chavez MacGregor and Dacia Christin, the SLAI Program Manager. You can find their contact information in the SWOG Directory.

A big thanks to the AYA committee for extending this invitation to the Latin America Initiative. We hope to work with you on future collaborations!

... the NCI definition for AYA populations is generally used, encompassing ages 15 to 39, whereas some Latin American countries define AYA populations as 24 or even younger.



TOBACCO CONTROL IN LATIN AMERICA. NEW PRODUCTS, NEW CHALLENGES.

The “Framework Convention on Tobacco Control” (FCTC), the first international public health treaty negotiated under the World Health Organization, came into force in 2005. As of January 2024, 180 countries have ratified the FCTC. Eighty percent of Latin American countries have implemented at least one FCTC article (Brazil has implemented all). Unfortunately, progress in the region has not been uniform, as some countries (e.g., Guatemala) lag behind in tobacco control.

Latin America has seen three new products on the market: capsule cigarettes, electronic cigarettes (e-cigarettes), and heated tobacco products (HTPs). Capsule cigarettes are combustible cigarettes that include one to three capsules in the filter. Once the cigarette is lit, the smoker can crush the capsules contained in the filter to change the flavor of the smoke. Chile, Peru, and Guatemala are the top three consumers of capsule cigarettes worldwide. In addition to a “customized” experience for each smoker, the tobacco industry has introduced marketing strategies, such as using the point-of-sale (POS), the cigarette pack, and stick, to attract new, particularly young, consumers.

Since their introduction in China in 2003, e-cigarettes are now available worldwide and remain largely unregulated. Most countries in



Dr. Joaquin Barnoya, MD, MPH, joined the SLAI Symposium in April from Guatemala, where he serves as the Director of Research at the Integra Cancer Institute. He is also Adjunct Professor at the Colorado School of Public Health.

Latin America have banned them, although regulations are poorly enforced. As with capsule cigarettes, e-cigarettes can be customized for each consumer, changing flavors, number of puffs, e-cigarette type, and even vapor color. They have been found to contain heavy metals and high levels of nicotine and salted nicotine. Similar to the United States, Mexico and Guatemala e-cigarette consumption in adolescents has been found to be higher compared to conventional cigarettes. Negative health consequences from e-cigarettes have begun to surface, ranging from nicotine addiction to endothelial damage.

Philip Morris’s IQOS, a type of HTP, is now available in seven Latin American countries where they are heavily marketed at the POS in urban centers. Data on HTP consumption in this region remains limited. However, so far it appears to be low among adolescents and

higher among young adults. Even though marketed as a “healthier option” compared to conventional cigarettes, HTPs have been found to contain carcinogens and may lead to endothelial damage similar to that observed in combustible cigarettes.

In Latin America, where FCTC implementation and enforcement remains weak in some countries, a burgeoning epidemic of capsule cigarette, e-cigarette, and HTP consumption is emerging. Effectively tackling this issue requires employing a multi-faceted approach which includes revising marketing restrictions to reduce the appeal of new products, particularly to younger populations; providing regulators with enforcement authority and resources to implement existing and future tobacco control laws; and reducing harm among current adult smokers through expanded access to evidence-based interventions.

**WANT TO
LEARN
MORE?**

We host SLAI symposiums at each group meeting and you are invited to attend! At the spring 2023 symposium, we focused on the cancer burden in adolescent and young adults and symptom management and control. To view the last symposium and learn more about SLAI institutions’ participation in SWOG, we hope you will watch the recorded meeting here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DYrqNQ1am5Q&feature=youtu.be>

“International collaborations are crucial for accessing cutting-edge advancements in oncological research and improving patient cancer outcomes globally.”

Dr. Tatiana Vidaurre

SPOTLIGHT FROM PAGE 4

A clinical oncology specialist and former INEN director, Dr. Tatiana Vidaurre serves as the SWOG Principal Investigator in Peru. She asserts:

“International collaborations are crucial for accessing cutting-edge advancements in oncological research and improving patient cancer outcomes globally. Our collaboration with SWOG enhances knowledge, scientific interchange, and research training. Importantly, it accelerates the translation of research findings into clinical practice. For Peru, it means implementing innovation for cancer control, reducing healthcare disparities, and improving the quality of care for cancer patients by broadening treatment options authorized by institutional authorities.”



Ninoska Macavilca, the lead site coordinator and research assistant, and Katherine Trello, biologist, help protocols (and people) move forward! Dr. Patricia Riojas joined the SWOG team in 2023 as site investigator for S2010. Dr. Olenka Peralta, a medical oncology fellow, Dr. Sandro Casavilca, Head of the

INEN Tumor Tissue Bank, and Dr. Juan Carlos Haro, Executive Director of the INEN Research Department, contribute significantly to this team, among other specialists. The more protocols of local interest become available, the more this team will grow!



RECORDINGS OF THE SLAI TRAINING CONFERENCE

The SLAI conference was hosted by the Instituto Nacional de Cancerología in Bogotá, Colombia. The conference was shown live on the INC's YouTube channel. [The Front Line featured an article](#) about it that you should check out.

If you speak Spanish (or want to practice), you can watch recordings of the conference here:

[Day One](#)

[Day Two](#)

[Day Three](#)

