



SWOG Latin America Initiative NEWSLETTER

SWOG CANCER RESEARCH NETWORK

THE HOPE FOUNDATION FOR CANCER RESEARCH

Strengthening Relationships for Latino Patients with Cancer

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LETTER FROM THE SWOG EXECUTIVE OFFICER FOR INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

Dear Readers,

As we reflect on the recent activities of the SWOG Latin America Initiative (SLAI), we are filled with gratitude for your continued interest and support. In this newsletter we are excited to highlight areas of current work, future plans, and give you a summary of the topics discussed during our SLAI spring symposium in Seattle.

This year's symposium centered around a theme of profound importance: health resource utilization, costs, and financial toxicity in cancer care. The enthusiasm and engagement from our audience

underscored the relevance of this topic, particularly for our members in Latin America. We were honored to have Dr. Federico Augustovski join us virtually from Argentina, shedding light on cancer care delivery in the region. Dr. Veena Shankaran's exceptional summary of health resource utilization, equity, and financial toxicity in the US provided valuable insights. The symposium also featured Dr. Tatiana Vidaurre's presentation on Peru's National Cancer Control Plan and Dr. Scott Ramsey's exploration of collaboration opportunities with the cancer care delivery committee. In keeping with our



Dr. Marianna Chavez Mac Gregor

tradition, we spotlighted one of our partner sites, this time celebrating our colleagues in Uruguay. In addition to finding information about some of the symposium themes in this newsletter, we encourage SWOG members to sign in to the SWOG website to watch the recording of the symposium on swog.org/spring-2024-group-meeting-recordings. This symposium was testament of the power of collaboration; we welcomed investigators from both local institutions and across Latin America, and the hybrid format allowed our international research teams to participate remotely in future events.

Beyond the symposium, we have been focusing our efforts on several fronts. A productive collaboration with GI committee leaders has led to the creation of a GI interest working group with representatives of Peru, Mexico, Chile, and Uruguay. We are particularly proud of Dr. Iván Lyra, whose concept received support to move forward. Dr. Lyra will further develop this promising idea during the SWOG early-stage investigator training course. We're also expanding our research horizons beyond solid tumors. Under Dr. Luis Malpica's leadership, we're exploring the possibility of engaging in lymphoma research, with a focus on variants that are rare in the United States but

CONTINUED ON PAGE 3

“To further advance our field and make a meaningful impact on the millions of Hispanic patients in the US, it is crucial to develop more inclusive protocols that specifically address cancers relevant to Hispanic and other minority populations.”

DR. MARIANNA CHAVEZ MAC GREGOR

SLAI UPDATES

The table below lists studies the SWOG sites in Latin America have activated or are now working to activate. But there is a long list of additional SWOG studies that the SLAI and the SWOG protocol team are following closely for possible future participation.

International member institutions in SWOG are National Clinical Trials Network (NCTN) sites, which means they can participate in nearly any NCTN protocol (and many NCI Community Oncology Research Program (NCORP) protocols), provided there are no barriers to international participation. International member institutions are expected to show progress towards meeting SWOG membership requirements, which includes accruing an average of 10 members per year over three years. However, far fewer trials are available to international members, making it challenging for most sites to meet these expectations.

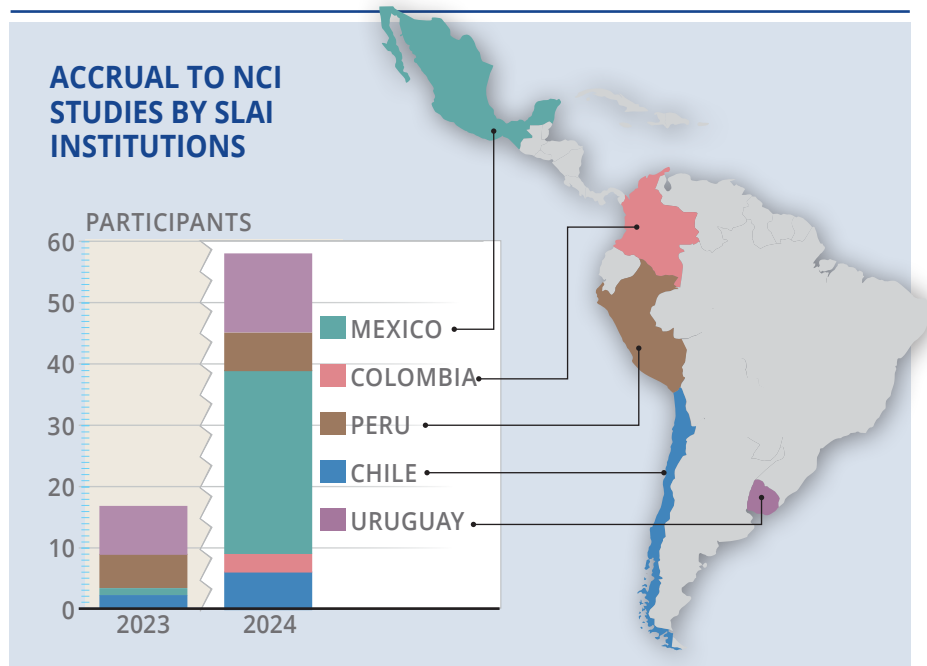
This winter, LACOG, the SWOG member site in Brazil, comprising one treatment site in Porto Alegre, formally and amicably ended its membership in the SLAI. After discussions with the SLAI coordinating team, it became clear that LACOG's ability to open SWOG trials was severely restricted due to national regulations and the limited types of SWOG trials available to international sites. Although this outcome was disappointing for everyone involved, we believe it was the best decision for the SLAI and our colleagues in Brazil. As we move to the future, we remain hopeful that the lessons learned will help us identify the optimal partners to expand this initiative.

ACCRUAL TO NCI STUDIES BY SLAI INSTITUTIONS

Study	Activated	In activation process
S1501		Chile (<i>pending re-opening</i>)
S1703	Uruguay, Peru	Chile, Mexico
S1802	Colombia, Mexico, Chile	
S1827	Colombia, Mexico, Chile	
S2010	Chile, Mexico, Peru, Uruguay	
S2013	Chile, Mexico, Uruguay	
S2104		Colombia, Mexico, Uruguay (<i>protocol in translation</i>)
S2212		Mexico (<i>protocol in translation</i>)
EA1151	Chile	
EA2197		Chile, Mexico
EA8134		Mexico
BR009		Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Uruguay (<i>protocol in translation</i>)
HN009		Mexico
GY019		Chile, Mexico, Peru, Uruguay

SWOG is revising a policy to make it clear that SWOG supports including its international member institutions in SWOG studies unless explicit feasibility barriers exist. From the SWOG perspective, the holder of the Investigational New Drug (IND) application is the most frequent barrier. Currently, international members can only participate in IND studies if the Cancer Therapy

Evaluation Program of the US NCI holds the IND. Frequently, CTEP is unable to approved international participation requests because of logistical, financial, or human resource restraints. We thank all SWOG committees for their dedication to making SWOG trials available to patients at international member institutions whenever possible.



more prevalent in Latin America. This initiative exemplifies our commitment to addressing unique regional health challenges.

As we look to the future, we remain dedicated to facilitating the activation of SWOG clinical trials in Latin America. We are actively engaging with our colleagues in the Operations Office to streamline the processes for biospecimen requirements and refine informed consent guidance for our international member sites. None of this progress would be possible without the support of SWOG leadership and The Hope Foundation, both instrumental as we navigate the exciting and transformative terrain of global oncology. We invite all SWOG members to learn more about us—the SLAI is full of collaborative opportunities, which extend beyond clinical trials and include mentoring opportunities and the development of bidirectional academic relationships. As we persevere in this journey together, we continue to be inspired by the power of collaboration in advancing cancer research. Thank you for being an integral part of this vital initiative. Together, we are making strides that transcend borders and bring hope to cancer patients worldwide.

Sincerely,



Dr. Marianna Chavez Mac Gregor

SWOG GASTROINTESTINAL COMMITTEE AND THE SLAI:

A NEW APPROACH TO INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATION IN SWOG

From the early days of the **SWOG Latin America Initiative**, it has been our hope to identify investigators in the region to join SWOG committees and propose clinical trials through the SWOG mechanism. With the engagement of Latin American investigators and the leadership of the SWOG gastrointestinal (GI) committee, we are getting closer to realizing that dream.

Dr. Ivan Lyra (Uruguay) and Dr. Erika Ruiz (Mexico) have joined the GI committee and several subcommittees. Dr. Lyra has proposed a clinical trial in patients with localized gastroesophageal cancers in whom a de-escalation of systemic therapy may offer an effective but also a more tolerable therapy. This has the potential to impact standard of care with regards to quality of life of patients in addition to cost savings. With the collaboration of SWOG investigator Dr. David Zhen, this proposal is being developed in SWOG and will be one of the trials featured in the 2024 Early-Stage Investigator Training Course.

Our efforts to involve the GI committee in SLAI activities have included participation of Drs. E. Gabriela Chiorean and Flavio Rocha in the research conference in Colombia in 2024, and invitations to GI Chair Dr. Philip Philip and Co-Chair Dr. Chiorean to the conference being planned for this fall in Peru. According to Dr. Philip, “SLAI provides GI oncology researchers in SWOG a unique opportunity to collaborate in clinical trials deemed practice-changing in USA

“ SLAI provides GI oncology researchers in SWOG a unique opportunity to collaborate in clinical trials deemed practice-changing in USA and Latin America. It also boosts the efforts for diversity in clinical trial populations. ”

DR. PHILIP PHILIP

and Latin America. It also boosts the efforts for diversity in clinical trial populations. As part of this partnership, we are seeking ways to simplify and streamline access to biological materials from Latin American to expand our understanding of unique host factors that impact differences in outcomes, especially with immune modulating treatments.”

We extend a special thanks to GI committee members and GI protocol manager Andrea Garcia, who have provided a warm welcome and guidance to our Latin American colleagues.

This interaction between SLAI and the GI committee is a good model for the SLAI team going forward.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR CANCER CARE DELIVERY RESEARCH IN THE SLAI

Given the limited resource settings in Latin American countries, the SLAI institutions have a sincere and heartfelt interest in participating in studies related to treatment delivery and access, cost effectiveness, and alleviating financial toxicity.

The SLAI coordinating team reached out to the cancer care delivery (CCD) committee to evaluate contexts in which collaborations with SWOG Latin American institutions might be possible. We understood that studying outcomes related to the US health system would be limited to US sites, but we did not fully understand another limitation. Although the SLAI and the CCD committee would have liked to include Latin America in studies with potential reciprocal benefit, the NCORP (NCI's Community Oncology Research Program) cooperative agreement currently only permits NCORP sites to participate in this

committee's studies. NCORP sites are community hospitals funded through this group. To our knowledge, this is currently the only committee with this funding limitation, and unfortunately, it is beyond the control of both the SLAI and CCD committee.

A "no" is really only a "no" when you haven't yet found a path forward. We are exploring other

ways that Latin America may be able to collaborate on CCD research within and without SWOG. The first strategy is to encourage Latin American investigators to join the CCD committee. Dr. Tatiana Vidaurre has already become a member, and another investigator has expressed interest. If they identify proposals that could benefit Latin American patients, institutions or health systems, the SWOG Latin American sites may be able to secure alternate funding for local research and work in conjunction with the SWOG CCD committee. Another approach we are discussing is to create a CCD working group. This group would serve as a round table to discuss and evaluate feasibility of research that could be conducted in parallel with the SWOG CCD committee or even Latin American-specific studies to be conducted independent of SWOG.

We are still in explorer mode and will keep readers updated of any exciting developments.



SLAI INVESTIGATOR UPDATES:

Dr. Natalia Jarra at GOCCHI,

a SWOG member site in Chile, learned of Dr. Harris's proposal for a preoperative radiotherapy trial comparing hypofractionated radiotherapy (larger doses of radiation given over a shorter time frame) versus standard regimens. In Latin America, there are limited resources for radiation treatment access, so evaluating hypofractionated regimens could increase treatment access for more patients. Dr. Jarra continued to vocally support this trial in committee



meetings and became the first SLAI co-chair on a SWOG study! This trial is undergoing revisions for a re-submission. Regardless of the outcome, Dr. Jarra has valued the experience learning about the protocol development process in SWOG, and we are thrilled that a SLAI investigator has become a co-chair!

Dr. Javier Retamales at GOCCHI, a SWOG member site in Chile, was the recipient of a Hope Foundation SEED grant to

conduct a pilot study using technology to simplify electronic patient-reported



outcome (ePRO) submission for caregivers during end-of-life care. This was not Dr. Retamales' first application, which goes to show that perseverance, receptiveness to feedback, and hard work pay off!

Finally, although not officially a SLAI investigator, **Curt Malloy**, a core member of the SLAI coordinating team, has left SWOG and Cancer

Research And Biostatistics to follow a career path elsewhere. Curt was (and remains) a long-time champion of the SLAI; his positive outlook and kindness will be profoundly missed by all.



DR. IVÁN LYRA, SWOG GI COMMITTEE MEMBER AND 2024 EARLY-STAGE INVESTIGATOR TRAINING COURSE CANDIDATE

My name is Dr. Iván Lyra, and I am an investigator from the Hospital de Clínicas Dr. Manuel Quintela, one of the sub-affiliate institutions, in Uruguay. I am honored to have been chosen as the SLAI candidate for the Early-Stage Investigator Training in 2024.

My proposal focuses on a de-escalation trial for patients with gastric and esophageal cancers, aiming to enhance treatment effectiveness while reducing toxicity. The feedback and support from the gastrointestinal committee and several sub-committees have been crucial in advancing my proposal within SWOG. Navigating the different steps in the SWOG and NCTN system has been an insightful journey. Engaging with the GI committee has been particularly rewarding, as their constructive feedback helped refine the study's design. Dr. David Zhen, co-investigator on this

project, has played a key role in this process, ensuring a strong scientific foundation.

Before submitting this proposal to the GI committee, I also presented a cost effectiveness component for S2013 "Immune Checkpoint Inhibitor Toxicity (I-CHECKIT): A Prospective Observational Study" to the symptom management and control committee in 2021. The study team is currently evaluating whether there is sufficient data available to move forward with analysis. Additionally, I have volunteered to translate the S2104 protocol into Spanish [SLAI sites must submit protocols in Spanish for IRB reviews]. Such translations

are necessary to make research more accessible and help to foster international collaboration.

In addition to research, I have taken on leadership roles such as helping to host the SLAI research conference in Uruguay in 2022 and mentoring local researchers' proposals for a SWOG scientific review held at the same time.

One of the highlights of my involvement has been the opportunity to support other Latin American investigators. My advice for fellow researchers is to actively engage with SWOG committees, as the feedback and support are invaluable.

These experiences with SWOG have not only strengthened the research community in Uruguay but also provided valuable insights into the collaborative nature of scientific research.

“One of the highlights of my involvement has been the opportunity to support other Latin American investigators. My advice for fellow researchers is to actively engage with SWOG committees, as the feedback and support are invaluable.”

DR. IVAN LYRA



SPOTLIGHT ON URUGUAY

Uruguay has a population of 3.5 million.

Each year, around 16,000 patients are diagnosed with cancer, and nearly 9,000 succumb to the disease [GLOBOCAN 2024]. Breast, colorectum, lung and prostate cancers are the most frequent cancers, accounting for half of the annual cancer deaths. Over the next 20 years, models predict a significant increase in cancer incidence and mortality attributed to population ageing and growth in the Latin America region (Piñeros et al 2022).



SLAI clinical trials training conference hosted in Uruguay in 2022. Dr. Mauricio Cuello, the site PI, is in white lab coat in center.

To help address the projected rise in cancer-related mortality and identify effective interventions, Uruguay is striving to strengthen its research capacity. The country faces challenges, including limited funding for local research, regulatory barriers, and capacity constraints. Research from the private sector came to a halt several years ago due to implementation of stringent national regulations, ultimately limiting availability of new or affordable treatments for patients. Consequently, Uruguay has focused primarily on academic studies to identify opportunities and solutions for pressing health problems, with SWOG providing a platform for research participation.

In October 2021, the Universidad de la República (University of the Republic) in Uruguay became a SWOG main member site. The university serves as an administrative site for two sub-affiliates that are both treatment institutions. As SWOG members, the Uruguayan team seeks to identify studies with barriers that can be overcome within their regulatory environment, thereby helping to develop capacity and resources and increase their visibility in international collaborations

Dr. Mauricio Cuello, a lung cancer specialist, is the SWOG principal investigator and has a strong interest in research that could enhance treatment affordability. Dr. Iván Lyra González, a medical oncologist and investigator in gastrointestinal cancers, also plays



a leadership role (see article in this edition). Ms. Migdacelys Arbolaez serves as lead oncology research professional (or HCRA), while Drs. Cecilia Castilla and Maria Guerrina serve as investigators for activated SWOG breast studies.

Since becoming a SWOG member, the team has enrolled 22 patients to S2013, 3 patients to S2010, and 1 patient to S1701. They are working on activating GY019, BR009, and S2104 this year or next. Why might it take so long to activate? On average, regulatory approval takes around 20 weeks per study, but it may take up to a year, especially if specific specimens in the protocol require additional national regulatory authorization. Uruguay is currently considering legislation that may improve study approval timeline. If passed, the team hopes to obtain study approvals in 10 to 12 weeks.

Currently, only around 12% of the

three thousand researchers in Uruguay are involved in medical sciences and of these, most are involved in basic sciences research. During his presentation at the symposium, Dr. Lyra shared that Uruguay plans to boost the number of researchers involved in medical research. The SLAI hopes to play a supporting role in these capacity building efforts through clinical trial conferences and helping identify mentorship opportunities for promising local investigators.

REFERENCES: Ferlay J et al (2024). *Global Cancer Observatory: Cancer Today*. Lyon, France: International Agency for Research on Cancer. Available from: <https://gco.iarc.who.int/today>, (Accessed on: 22 July 2024).

Piñeros M et al (2022). An updated profile of the cancer burden, patterns and trends in Latin America and the Caribbean. *The Lancet Regional Health - Americas*, 13, p.100294. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lana.2022.100294>.



The Right Stuff: Drs. Alex Herrera and Luis Malpica, of the SWOG lymphoma committee

NEW KIDS ON THE BLOCK: LYMPHOMA INVESTIGATORS ARE JOINING THE SLAI

In 2023, Dr. Blanke provided the SLAI coordinating team a virtual introduction to Dr. Luis Malpica, an ASCO Winn Diversity in Clinical Trials Award recipient. Dr. Malpica, a graduate of Universidad Peruana Cayetano Heredia in Peru and an assistant professor in the Department of Lymphoma/Myeloma at MD Anderson, has helped foster US and Latin American research collaborations in lymphomas. Most notably, he played a significant role in mentorship and in increasing active participation in the international research community to the Latin American Study Group of Lymphoproliferative Disease (Grupo de Estudio Latinoamericano de Linfoproliferativos [GELL]).

The SLAI has not yet been active in hematological malignancies, so the SLAI coordinating team was eager to meet Dr. Malpica and learn more about his research. Furthermore, it needed be established whether there was a viable path forward for SWOG and the Latin American SWOG institutions to open lymphoma trials in the region.

While certain types of lymphomas

are rare in the US, there is wide geographic variation that together with viral and genomic factors result in some lymphomas—for example, HTLV-1-associated-adult T-cell lymphomas (ATLL); EBV-positive diffuse large B cell lymphoma (EBV-DLBCL); and extranodal natural killer T-cell lymphoma (ENKTL)—appearing more frequently in Latin America (see image). In the US, the rarity of these

tumors means slow or insufficient accrual to some studies.

Currently, much research on lymphoma in Latin America focuses on lymphoma type, treatment characteristics, and outcomes. Patients often present with more aggressive types of lymphoma and are diagnosed at a younger age compared to patients in higher income countries (Malpica 2021). Many novel treatments available in higher income countries do not exist in this context. In an ideal world, these patients would have greater access to clinical trials and novel treatments to give them more choices and improved survival.

During Dr. Malpica's presentation to the lymphoma working group at the 2024 SWOG spring group meeting in Seattle, he

CONTINUED ON PAGE 8

LYMPHOMA FROM PAGE 7

demonstrated the success of the GELL network in multinational, collaborative studies. This included training clinical staff specialized in lymphoma research; determining availability and limitations of existing imaging technologies in the region; developing relationships with regional pharmaceuticals to gain drug access; presenting findings at ASCO, ASH, and SWOG; and publishing research in peer-reviewed journals.

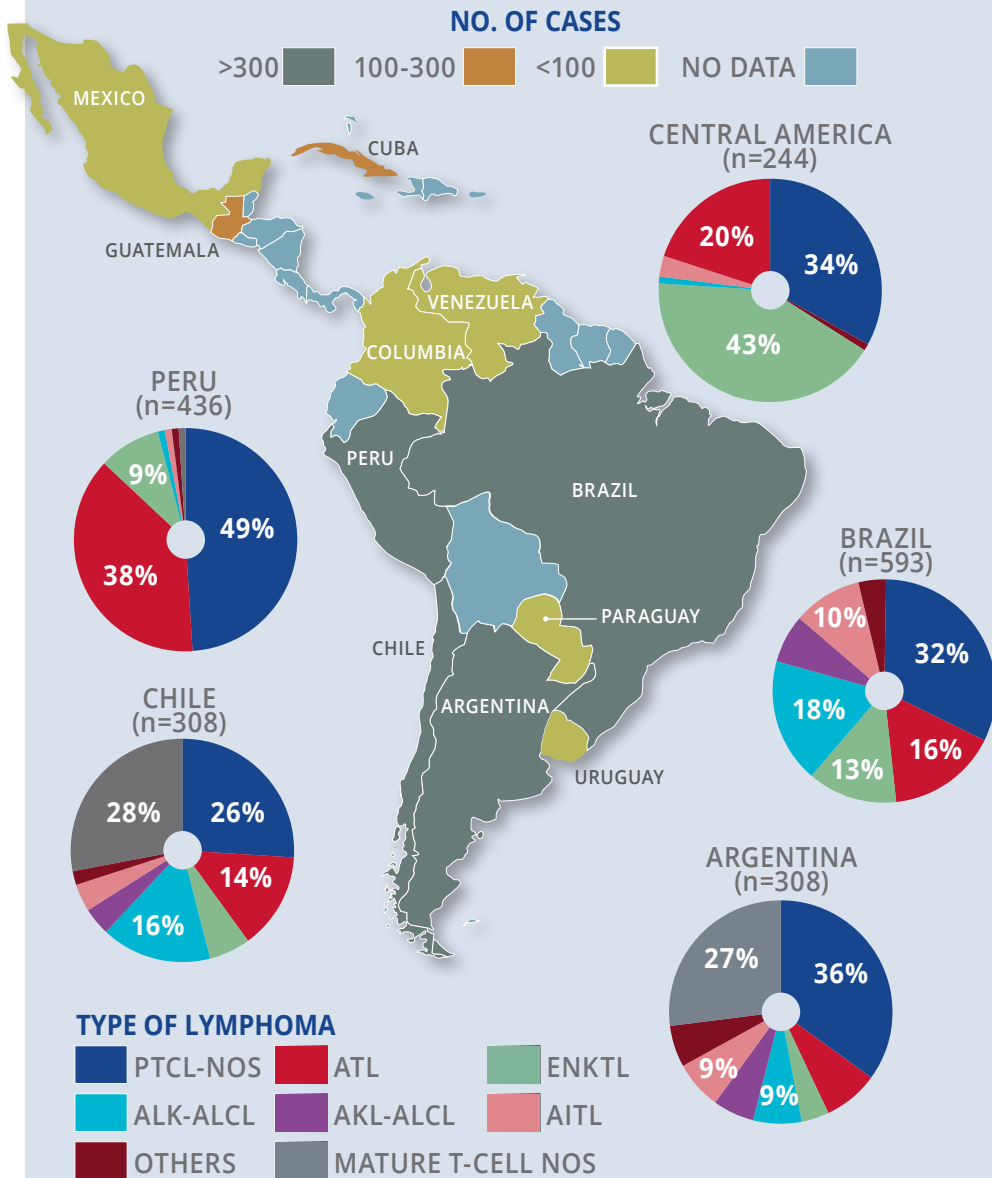
Several GELL collaborators in Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Peru, and Uruguay already work at SWOG member institutions. These researchers have demonstrated their capacity to conduct epidemiologic studies in lymphoma, and their institutions have experience recruiting to SWOG clinical trials in other areas. Dr. Malpica is organizing meetings with local collaborators and the SWOG Latin American institutions to ensure his colleagues become SWOG members and can open SWOG lymphoma trials when feasible.

Given this foundation, the SWOG lymphoma committee has a unique opportunity to enhance ethnic and racial diversity in ongoing and upcoming trials, provided the studies are feasible internationally. Furthermore, the SLAI may offer access to a unique population that would help achieve recruitment goals and help improve outcomes for patients with few options.

Dr. Malpica is already working on some research proposals. To learn more, consider attending the next SLAI Symposium, where we might get a glimpse of what is to come!

NUMBER OF LYMPHOMA CASES BY COUNTRY AND TYPE

Number of cases by country and lymphoma type from the retrospective registry of the Grupo de Estudio Latinoamericano de Linfoproliferativos, the Brazilian T-cell Project, and the prospective registry of the International T cell Project



Reference: Fischer & Malpica Blood (2023) 142 (Supplement 1): 186.

WANT TO PARTAKE IN A DISCUSSION ABOUT FUTURE RESEARCH ON LYMPHOMAS IN LATIN AMERICA?

We host Latin America symposiums at each SWOG group meeting that you are invited to attend.

In any symposium, you can expect to learn more about research areas of interest in Latin America and the SWOG sites in the region. At the next symposium, we are excited to partner with colleagues in the SWOG lymphoma committee to learn about lymphomas in the US and Latin America and explore areas of collaboration.

