



St. Joseph's Hospital and Medical Center

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Barrow Scientists Partner with Hispanic “El Grupo” in Alzheimer’s Research

Researchers from the Barrow Neurological Institute and aging Hispanic alumni from Phoenix *Union High School* are partnering in a major research trial to study Alzheimer’s disease in the ethnic community.

More than 20 graduates from the high school, who belong to a social club called “El Grupo,” have joined neuroscientists at Barrow to study memory loss and Alzheimer’s disease among the Hispanic community. Recent reports suggest Hispanics are at a greater risk for Alzheimer’s than other groups, lending a greater urgency to this study. There are currently 200,000 Latinos in America with Alzheimer’s and that number could increase to 1.3 million by 2050, a growth rate of 600 percent, according to the Alzheimer’s Association.

“For some reason it is hard to get Hispanics involved in these research projects,” says Jose Burruel, 84, who is part of the study and launched the social group’s involvement with Barrow about six years ago. Since Burruel signed up for the study, he has invited Barrow researchers to attend El Grupo’s breakfast gatherings at Bitzee Mama’s restaurant in Glendale.

“El Grupo started out as a social network of old friends, and now the group is also an important participant in scientific research,” says Dr. Leslie Baxter, a staff scientist and Clinical Neuropsychologist at Barrow. Dr. Baxter has been instrumental in the research with El Grupo and has used data from the group to get a broader picture of how Alzheimer’s affects the ethnic group.

Baxter and other Barrow staffers attend El Grupo’s breakfast gatherings and keep members updated on Alzheimer’s research. El Grupo members are participating in various memory studies involving family history, cognitive and blood tests and MRI evaluations at Barrow.

“We are so fortunate to have El Grupo members as part of our study,” says Dr. Baxter. “It is a challenge to get participants from ethnically diverse backgrounds involved. This study can affect research across the world.”

St. Joseph’s is one of several local hospitals and research centers participating in the Arizona Alzheimer’s Consortium. This study is part of that Consortium’s broader efforts at Alzheimer’s research.

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Editor’s Please Note: Dr. Baxter will be speaking at this month’s El Grupo’s meeting November 11 at Bitzee Mama’s restaurant at 7023 N. 58th Ave. in Glendale. The Alzheimer’s research discussion will begin at 8 a.m.

Dr. Leslie Baxter and Jose Burruel are also available for interviews.