



NIH GRANT FUELS STUDY ON DANCE AS MEANS TO IMPROVE HEALTH OF LATINO SENIORS

With support from a four-year, \$1.7 million grant from the National Institutes of Health, a UI Health study is examining whether an instructional dance program for Latino seniors can improve their level of physical activity, and with it, their balance, mobility and cognitive function.

Latinos ages 65 to 74 are twice as likely to report difficulty walking as are non-Latino whites and develop symptoms of Alzheimer's disease an average of seven years earlier. These health disparities are likely due in part to Latino seniors' having a lower level of physical activity than other older adults, according to David Marquez, PhD, an assistant professor of kinesiology and nutrition, who is leading the study.

"Older Latinos are also at high risk of developing disabilities, and one of our long-term goals is to prevent disability among this disadvantaged group," Marquez says.

Dance is widely accepted among Latinos, but seniors have few opportunities for dancing, Marquez says. Nightclub dancing is often too fast-paced and too late at night for older adults, he adds. In a pilot study of his dance program, Marquez found that there was a great deal of interest in dancing among this population.

Marquez teamed up with Miguel Mendez, an accomplished dancer and founder of the Dance Academy of Salsa and Latin Dance in Chicago. With input from focus groups, they developed an instruction program of Latin dances for older adults called BAILAMOS ("we dance").



David Marquez, PhD, an assistant professor of kinesiology and nutrition



Miguel Mendez, founder of the Dance Academy of Salsa and Latin Dance in Chicago

The four-month, twice weekly dance classes will be offered in senior centers, community centers and park buildings. Half of the 332 older Latinos who will be recruited will be assigned to the dance instruction program, and the other half will serve as a control group for the study.

Participants will be followed for an additional four-month maintenance program to see if they continue to participate in physical activity and whether any other positive physical or cognitive outcomes, such as improved balance or increased social interactions, are derived. The maintenance program includes a training program for leaders at each site to encourage people to continue to dance together.

If you would like to learn more about this research, please contact David X. Marquez at 312.996.1209 or marquezd@uic.edu.

