



Hispanics at Higher Risk

By Dominique Vargas

Cancer is the second leading cause of death among Hispanic with diseases, according to The American Cancer Society report.

Dr. Felix Aguilar is a family practitioner in Long Beach, California and he volunteers for the American Cancer Society. He is the first doctor his patients go to and if he sees a problem, he'll send them to an oncologist. And it's common for his patients to think.

“‘Oh my god cancer’ it means death,” said Aguilar.

This fatalist mentality is a cultural reason Hispanics are at greater risk for dying from cancer.

“We’re very good about that, ‘oh I’m going to die it doesn’t matter, it’s okay,” said Aguilar. “So when I hear that from my patients I tell them ‘well if you don’t want to do for yourself do it for your family.’”

Familism, Aguilar calls it, is another cultural factor. Husbands and wives need to support each other and take each other to their yearly exams, like pap smears, mammograms and prostate exams. He said this support is especially important for men.

“Because a lot of men think that if they do a prostate exam that they will lose their manhood and that is not true, it might save your life,” said Aguilar.

He believes there are five things anyone can do to help prevent cancer, including not smoking, being active everyday, getting yearly exams, supporting each other and eating at least five fruits and vegetables a day.

“And I joke with my patients because sometimes I tell them this and then they tell me ‘oh my god you’re killing me, five is too many, five fruits.’ And I say well if I said five tacos or five donuts, you’d say only five how about half a dozen...”

Aguilar shares his top five with all of his patients. He says cancer is a depressing subject, but it doesn't have to be. If doctors can catch cancer early the chances of curing it are higher.

“The report emphasizes that cancer remains a big problem in the latino community and that people die every year because of it,” he said. “A lot of those deaths didn't have to be.”

To read this report or other cancer information you can visit the American Cancer Society website (www.cancer.org).