



Bibhushi Bhattarai

Trainee, 10-week track

INSTITUTION University of Puerto Rico Comprehensive Cancer Center

MENTOR(S) Dr. Nancy Cardona

SUMMER PROJECT

Association between sociodemographic, reproductive, lifestyle, familial factors and breast cancer risk among Puerto Rican women

TESTIMONIAL

"The CAPAC program gave me the opportunity to conduct meaningful research while exploring Puerto Rico with an amazing group of colleagues. Learning, collaborating, and experiencing the island's culture together made the program both rewarding and unforgettable. I am grateful for the knowledge, friendships, and memories I gained through this experience."



Julieann Colón Sarriera

Trainee, 10-week track

INSTITUTION University of Puerto Rico Medical Sciences Campus

MENTOR(S) Dr. Josefina Romaguera

SUMMER PROJECT

Cervicovaginal microbiome in HPV infections

TESTIMONIAL

"Participating in the Cancer Prevention and Control Research Training Program was an invaluable experience during my time as a medical student. CAPAC gave me hands-on exposure to clinical research settings and deepened my understanding of cancer prevention and control research. This experience strengthened my interest in pursuing research as part of my future career in medicine, and I'm grateful for the mentorship and guidance I received throughout the program."



Selene Schiavone Chamorro

Trainee, 10-week track

INSTITUTION University of Puerto Rico Comprehensive Cancer Center

MENTOR(S) Dr. María González Pons

SUMMER PROJECT

Using Patient-Derived Colorectal Organoids to Explore IL-6-Driven Colorectal Carcinogenesis

TESTIMONIAL

"The CAPAC Program has been an incredibly valuable experience that has strengthened my development as both a researcher and medical student. In addition to expanding my knowledge of cancer biology, I was able to connect this knowledge with cancer health disparities in Puerto Rico and learn how biological, environmental and social factors interact to influence cancer risk. The program reinforced my interest in pursuing research as a future physician while showing me how research can be used to address disparities affecting underrepresented communities. I am very grateful to have participated in CAPAC and would recommend the program to anyone interested in cancer prevention, regardless of their academic background or field of study."



Laurie M. Santos Rodríguez

Trainee, 15-week track

INSTITUTION San Juan Bautista Medical School

MENTOR(S) Dr. Yamixa Delgado

SUMMER PROJECT

CD44-targeted dual-bullet nanoplatfrom to modulate apoptotic and metastatic pathways in non-small cell lung cancer

TESTIMONIAL

"My experience as part of the 2026 CAPAC Cohort has been a rewarding and valuable experience that has allowed me to gain both professional and personal maturity. This was thanks to the combination of mentorship, seminars, and interactions with other peers. In addition, my comprehension of cancer research, prevention and its control increased significantly in comparison to the beginning of the program. The CAPAC program provided a valuable setting to sharpen my science communication skills, while creating a meaningful professional network. I am grateful for the guidance, experiences, and opportunities the program provided."



Milena G. Narváez Aguilera

Trainee, 15-week track

INSTITUTION University of Puerto Rico Medical Sciences Campus

MENTOR(S) Dr. Abiel Roche-Lima

SUMMER PROJECT

Machine learning models for clinically relevant risk prediction using multi-omics data

TESTIMONIAL

"My experience in the CAPAC program was truly a great experience. I had the opportunity to learn more about cancer research while strengthening my research, data analysis, and presentation skills. CAPAC also pushed me out of my comfort zone and challenged me to try new things, which helped me grow both personally and professionally. One of my favorite parts of the program was meeting so many amazing people and being able to share this experience with them. I learned a lot throughout the summer, not only about research but also about myself and what I want for my future. This experience strengthened my interest in research and encouraged me to continue working toward pursuing a PhD in the future."



Juan P. González Mayoral

Trainee, 10-week track

INSTITUTION University of Puerto Rico Comprehensive Cancer Center

MENTOR(S) Dr. Elba V. Caraballo

SUMMER PROJECT

The Role of Wnt-b-catenin and NF-kB Pathways in Colorectal Cancer Advancement and Immune Evasion: A Multi-Omics Approach to Early Detection and Risk Stratification

TESTIMONIAL

"Participating in the CAPAC Summer Research Program has been an incredibly rewarding experience. Throughout the program, I strengthened my research skills, learned from dedicated mentors in the laboratory, and connected with an inspiring network of cancer researchers. CAPAC also provided us with the opportunity to present our research findings at a scientific conference, strengthening my confidence in communicating scientific findings. I will always cherish my time in the program and the friendships and professional relationships I built along the way."



Christian J. Figueroa Berríos

Trainee, 10-week track

INSTITUTION Ponce Health Science University

MENTOR(S) Dr. Pedro Santiago

SUMMER PROJECT

ADCK4-NUMBL fusion in lung adenocarcinoma aggressiveness

TESTIMONIAL

“Participating in the CAPAC Research Training Program was an incredibly rewarding experience that strengthened my passion for research and medicine. Through the program, I had the opportunity to expand my laboratory skills, work alongside dedicated mentors and researchers, and contribute to meaningful cancer research. Presenting my work at the UPR Comprehensive Cancer Center Scientific Day was especially rewarding and reflected how much I had grown throughout the summer. I am grateful to CAPAC for an experience that will continue to influence my development as a medical student and future physician.”



María E. Collazo Rivera

Trainee, 10-week track

INSTITUTION University of Puerto Rico Comprehensive Cancer Center

MENTOR(S) Dr. Axel Gierbolini and Dr. Karen Ortiz

SUMMER PROJECT

Factors associated with hospice utilization among patients at the end of life

TESTIMONIAL

“Participating in the CAPAC 10-week Research Training Program was an incredibly rewarding experience that exceeded all my expectations. At the Puerto Rico Central Cancer Registry, I gained hands-on experience in cancer surveillance, data analysis, scientific writing, and population research. I had the opportunity to contribute to a project on hospice utilization among cancer patients, develop a scientific abstract, poster, and manuscript, and recruit patients with cancer for an end-of-life research study. Beyond the research skills I developed, CAPAC introduced me to outstanding mentors whose guidance and support have greatly contributed to my development in the research field. This experience strengthened my interest in cancer care research, and I am grateful to have been part of a program that contributes to advancing cancer research in Puerto Rico.”



Amanda L. Jones Rodríguez

Trainee, 10-week track

INSTITUTION University of Puerto Rico Medical Sciences Campus

MENTOR(S) Dr. Sherily Pereira and Dr. Marievelisse Soto-Salgado

SUMMER PROJECT

Secondary data analysis between depression and health-related quality of life among cancer patients

Potential moderating Role of social support among patients

TESTIMONIAL

"Participating in the CAPAC Research Training Program has been one of the most meaningful experiences of my medical training. Beyond learning research methods and strengthening my scientific skills, the program taught me to look beyond the disease itself and recognize the importance of understanding each patient's experience. Through my project on health-related quality of life among breast cancer survivors, I learned that improving patient outcomes goes beyond treating cancer; it also requires addressing the psychosocial factors that shape how patients live with their diagnosis. This experience reinforced my commitment to pursuing cancer research that translates into better and more compassionate care for underserved Hispanic communities."



Julissa M. Jaiman Cruz

Trainee, 15-week track

INSTITUTION Ponce Health Science University

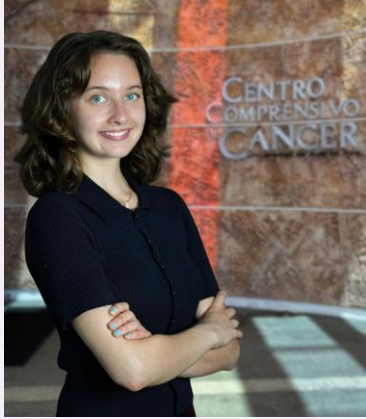
MENTOR(S) Dr. Alixida Ramos Pibernus

SUMMER PROJECT

Intervention to foster cervical cancer screening promotion for Latinx trans men among medical students

TESTIMONIAL

"Participating in CAPAC was a transformative experience that strengthened my commitment to the fight against cancer through both research and rehabilitation counseling. As a cancer survivor, I have experienced firsthand the importance of compassionate, evidence-based care, and this program showed me how research can help create meaningful changes for patients and families. CAPAC inspired me to continue building a career dedicated to advancing cancer health equity, improving quality of life, and giving a voice to those whose needs are often overlooked."



Anna T. Efstate

Trainee, 15-week track

INSTITUTION University of Puerto Rico Comprehensive Cancer Center

MENTOR(S) Dr. Héctor Franco

SUMMER PROJECT

Dissecting the Role of Inherited Non-Coding Variants in the Enhancer Architecture of Ovarian Cancer

TESTIMONIAL

"My experience with CAPAC was incredibly enriching, both professionally and personally. I had the opportunity to collaborate with people of admirable drive and intellect, which has encouraged me to continue pushing for cultivation of knowledge in cancer research even when confronted with obstacles. I look forward to progressing in my scientific career with a new perspective on research that I have gained throughout my time in Puerto Rico."



Juan E. Santiago García

Trainee, 15-week track

INSTITUTION University of Puerto Rico Comprehensive Cancer Center

MENTOR(S) Dr. Cynthia M. Pérez

SUMMER PROJECT

Environmental concerns among cancer patients and their caregivers by geographical location in Puerto Rico

TESTIMONIAL

"It was an honor to work with Dr. Cynthia Pérez and Dr. Ana Patricia Ortiz, and a pleasure to be able to meet my fellow trainees. This experience has helped me become a more well-rounded researcher. I recommend this program to anyone who has an interest in cancer research, prevention and control."



Mariadelmar Conde Alvarez

Trainee, 15-week track

INSTITUTION University of Puerto Rico Comprehensive Cancer Center

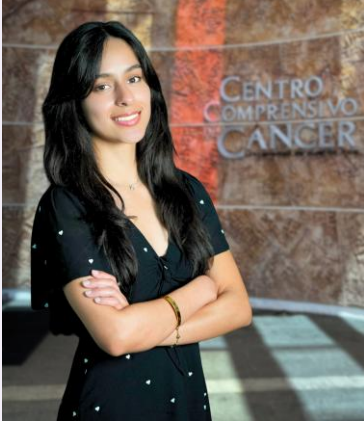
MENTOR(S) Dr. Marievelisse Soto-Salgado

SUMMER PROJECT

Factors influencing cervical cancer care across the cancer control continuum among women living with HIV in Puerto Rico

TESTIMONIAL

"Being part of the CAPAC program has been a truly meaningful experience. It gave me the opportunity to grow not only professionally, but also personally, by connecting with others who are equally committed to serving and strengthening our communities. Through CAPAC, I was able to expand my perspective, learn from different experiences, and reflect on the kind of impact I hope to make through my career in public health. I am especially grateful for the sense of community, mentorship, and encouragement I experienced throughout the program. CAPAC reminded me that meaningful change often begins with listening, collaboration, and a genuine commitment to the people we serve. I will carry the lessons, relationships, and experiences from this program with me as I continue my professional journey."



Michelle Torrico

Trainee, 10-week track

INSTITUTION University of Puerto Rico Comprehensive Cancer Center

MENTOR(S) Dr. Ana Patricia Ortiz

SUMMER PROJECT

Factors associated with HPV vaccination uptake among a clinic-based sample in Puerto Rico

Prevalence and correlates of obesity in HIV-positive and HIV-negative individuals in Puerto Rico

TESTIMONIAL

"CAPAC was an incredibly valuable experience for both my academic and professional development. I especially appreciated the opportunity to gain hands-on research experience and work closely with mentors who supported me throughout the program. Being able to contribute to cancer prevention research strengthened my research and data analysis skills and gave me a better understanding of how research can be used to address health disparities.

I also really valued the connections I made with the other CAPAC scholars. The team-building activities and opportunities to learn about everyone's different academic and professional backgrounds made the experience feel very collaborative and welcoming. It was especially meaningful to meet people pursuing different areas of health and research and learn from their experiences and perspectives.

Overall, CAPAC helped me grow more confident as a researcher, strengthened my interest in pursuing research as part of my career, and provided me with experiences and connections that I know will continue to influence my academic and professional development. I am very grateful to have been part of the program!."



Karama Shayeb

Trainee, 10-week track

INSTITUTION University of Puerto Rico Medical Sciences Campus

MENTOR(S) Dr. Eliud Hernández O'Farrill

SUMMER PROJECT

Synthesis of carbazole-chalcogen derivatives and their evaluation against metastatic cancer cell lines

TESTIMONIAL

"This research experience opened the door for me to explore the field of cancer research and gain a deeper understanding of the innovative work being done in Puerto Rico to advance cancer prevention, diagnosis, and treatment. I was truly inspired by the passion and dedication of the fellow trainees, mentors, and researchers, whose commitment to improving patients' lives reinforced my own desire to contribute to this field. This experience has strengthened my interest in research and the meaningful impact it can have on the future of healthcare."



Amanda C. Rivera Morales

Trainee, 10-week track

INSTITUTION Universidad Central del Caribe

MENTOR(S) Dr. Nawal Boukli

SUMMER PROJECT

Targeting GRP78 with Thera-GRP Triggers ER Stress-Mediated Apoptosis in GBM

TESTIMONIAL

"Being selected for the CAPAC program was a true honor and a transformative experience. The program helped me grow not only as a scientist, but also as a future physician and professional. I especially valued meeting students from diverse backgrounds and seeing how our unique perspectives strengthened our shared commitment to cancer research. CAPAC provided me with meaningful mentorship, hands-on research experience, and greater confidence in communicating scientific ideas. This experience reinforced my interest in research and inspired me to continue contributing to discoveries that may ultimately improve the lives of patients affected by cancer."



Valeria Herrero Martínez

Trainee, 10-week track

INSTITUTION University of Puerto Rico Comprehensive Cancer Center

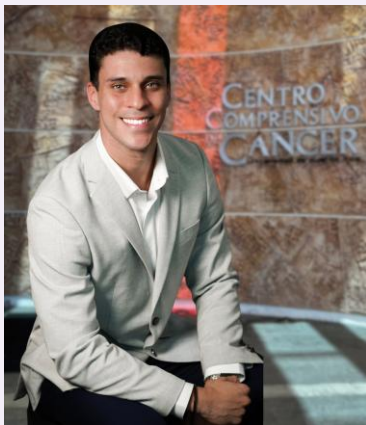
MENTOR(S) Dr. Yisel M. Cantres-Rosario

SUMMER PROJECT

Interplay between oral microbial products and brain immune cells and their roles in glioblastoma multiforme

TESTIMONIAL

"Participating in the CAPAC program has truly been a defining moment in my academic and professional journey. Beyond acquiring technical skills, the research experience, the sense of shared purpose fostered by the program, and the mentorship I received have helped me realize that I want research to remain an ongoing part of my future alongside clinical practice. For this renewed commitment, I would like to thank my PI, the research team, the program, as well as the mentors and professors whose encouragement throughout the years has shaped my journey and made opportunities like this one possible."



Jean Messon Bird

Trainee, 10-week track

INSTITUTION University of Puerto Rico Medical Sciences Campus

MENTOR(S) Dr. Suranganie Dharmawardhane

SUMMER PROJECT

Translational development of MBQ-157 as targeted therapy for breast cancer

TESTIMONIAL

"The CAPAC program broadened my perspective through its engaging seminars, which exposed me to the challenges of cancer care and health disparities in Puerto Rico. These discussions left me with the desire to integrate research and advocacy into my future practice in the hope of advancing health equity."



Paola N. Rodríguez Montoyo

Trainee, 10-week track

INSTITUTION University of Puerto Rico Comprehensive Cancer Center

MENTOR(S) Dr. Brenda Torres and Dr. Nancy Cardona

SUMMER PROJECT

Case-Control Study of Breast Cancer and Beauty Products

TESTIMONIAL

"The most meaningful part of my CAPAC experience was the confidence my mentors had in me. Instead of simply showing me the analyses, they trusted me to learn them, run them independently, and interpret the results on my own. That trust pushed me outside my comfort zone and helped me realize I was capable of doing much more than I thought. CAPAC not only strengthened my research skills but also gave me the confidence to pursue my goal of becoming an independent cancer researcher."



Gustavo E. Bertrán Roca

Trainee, 15-week track

INSTITUTION University of Puerto Rico Comprehensive Cancer Center

MENTOR(S) Dr. Julie Dutil

SUMMER PROJECT

Characterization of DCTN5-PALB2 bidirectional promoter in breast cancer

TESTIMONIAL

"My experience in CAPAC gave me a first-hand look at the important work done here in the Island. Being able to participate in this program improved my research skills and my ability to think as an independent scientist. I am grateful for this experience as it has increased my motivation towards cancer research."



Claudia S. Quiñones Flores

Trainee, 15-week track

INSTITUTION University of Puerto Rico Comprehensive Cancer Center

MENTOR(S) Dr. Natalie Alamo-Rodríguez

SUMMER PROJECT

Barriers and facilitators for public school students in pursuing cancer-related science careers

TESTIMONIAL

"This experience afforded me the opportunity to work across multiple stages of the scientific process, deepening my commitment to a social science and psychological lens on cancer research — an area of great need in the field. Working as a co-researcher built my confidence and reinforced my dedication to addressing the behavioral and social dimensions of cancer prevention and control."



Félix E. Ferrer Sáenz

Trainee, 10-week track

INSTITUTION University of Puerto Rico Comprehensive Cancer Center

MENTOR(S) Dr. Josué Pérez-Santiago

SUMMER PROJECT

Evaluation of biological factors associated with oral HPV infection, periodontal disease, and cancer-related inflammatory pathways

TESTIMONIAL

"The CAPAC program provided an enriching experience, allowing me to work on a project related to oral health, strengthen my bench-work skills, challenge my ability to develop research questions, and design workflows to answer them. This experience further reinforced my interest in research and its potential impact on patient care."



Luis F. Díaz Pagán

Peer-to-peer mentor, 10-week track

INSTITUTION University of Puerto Rico Comprehensive Cancer Center

MENTOR(S) Dr. Pablo E. Vivas-Mejia

SUMMER PROJECT

Characterization of MMP3 inhibitors for ovarian cancer treatment

TESTIMONIAL

“Buen programa con excelente administración, coordinación y directoras. Además de mejorar tus destrezas de pensamiento crítico, análisis de resultados y resolución de problemas, el programa te desarrolla profesionalmente a través de las diversas charlas y orientaciones que ofrecen los viernes.”



Richard J. Holcknecht

Peer-to-peer mentor, 15-week track

INSTITUTION University of Puerto Rico Comprehensive Cancer Center

MENTOR(S) Dr. Carola T. Sánchez-Díaz

SUMMER PROJECT

Health-Related Quality of Life (FACT-G) among adult cancer survivors in Puerto Rico enrolled in START-PR

Sleep disturbances and the association between cardiovascular comorbidity burden

TESTIMONIAL

“For me, the true worth of this program lies in the profound impact of mentorship. Guiding fellow peers, sharing knowledge, and fostering a supportive community of researchers has not only allowed me to contribute to the next generation of scientific minds in Puerto Rico, but has also deeply enriched my own professional journey. CAPAC stands out as a unique space where passion for research meets meaningful collaboration, proving that the ultimate value of our work is found in the community we build and the individuals we inspire.”