



# Sylvester Launches New Brain Tumor Project with Help of Celebrity Chef

Spurred on by a health crisis in her family, celebrity chef Lorena Garcia recently opened her Wynwood restaurant – and her menu – to help launch a new initiative to fight brain tumors. Garcia co-hosted a dinner at CHICA on April 27, along with the Glioblastoma Research Organization (GBMRO), to benefit Project Garcia, a fundraiser to support research at the Brain Tumor Initiative (BTI) at Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center, part of UHealth – the University of Miami Health System.



From left: Michael E. Ivan, M.D., Chef Lorena Garcia, and Amber Barbach

The nonprofit GBMRO presented a \$50,000 donation to help kickstart Project Garcia, its fourth fully funded glioblastoma research project and its first in collaboration with



Sylvester. Glioblastoma is a rare and fast-growing form of brain cancer.

"Glioblastoma is often a devastating diagnosis," said Michael E. Ivan, M.D., director of research for the BTI and associate professor of neurological surgery at the Miller School of Medicine. "We are incredibly grateful to the GBMRO for their support in funding Project Garcia. The only way that we will make an impact on patient outcomes is through more research, and these funds are critical to making that happen."

Among those attending the kick-off dinner were Ricardo Jorge Komotar, M.D., director of the BTI and professor of neurological surgery at the Miller School of Medicine, and Macarena de la Fuente, M.D., associate professor of neurology and chief of the neuro-oncology division at the Miller School. Both doctors played roles in successfully treating Garcia's brother, Carlos – who was also present at the dinner – when he was diagnosed with glioblastoma years ago.

Sylvester is South Florida's only NCI-designated cancer center and one of only two in the state. The Sylvester BTI comprises specialized physicians and researchers who are committed to brain tumor care. Researchers at the BTI strive to close the gap between pioneering research and promising treatments by exploring how cancers develop and progress and the intricacies of cellular interactions within tumors.



## Project Garcia Launch Event at CHICA

Project Garcia, established in Carlos's honor, will support novel research that uniquely applies an intraoperative strategy to guide tumor resection and identify infiltrating tumor cells that are responsible for tumor recurrence. This technique will revolutionize the surgical treatment for glioblastoma, allowing better outcomes and longer survival.

Garcia was instrumental in helping the GBMRO join forces with Sylvester. Two years after BTI physicians were able to help her brother, Garcia discovered the Glioblastoma Research Organization on Instagram and quickly became a brand ambassador.

"With this organization, we are committed to bring awareness and create more opportunities for this research to continue to grow so that we can find that cure," Garcia said. "Everything we have gone through is worth it because of this mission."

Founded in 2018 as a social media-based community, the Glioblastoma Research Organization connects people around the globe who are struggling with this rare and fast-growing form



of brain cancer, either themselves or within their families.

“When my father was dealing with his diagnosis, I didn’t have this resource,” said Amber Barbach, founder and director of the Glioblastoma Research Organization. “I created what I felt was missing. It is a space to find support, learn from others, and get involved with fundraising to cure this deadly disease.”

Garcia is known for her restaurants, including Lorena Garcia Tapas y Cocina, Lorena Garcia Culinary Loft in Miami, and CHICA, and for her appearances on Top Chef Masters, America’s Next Great Restaurant, and shows on Telemundo and Univision.

“My life and my family’s life changed forever when my brother received his diagnosis,” said Garcia. “When you go through these moments, all that I can say is that the doctors become everything for your family. They are changing somebody’s life and saving somebody’s life.”

If you would like to contribute to Project Garcia at the Sylvester Brain Tumor Initiative, please contact Britten King at [atbritten.king@med.miami.edu](mailto:atbritten.king@med.miami.edu) or 305-243-9949.

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