Sylvester Researcher Awarded Endowed Chair in Cancer Survivorship

The same year that Frank J. Penedo, Ph.D. ’99, started his undergraduate career at the University of Miami in 1983, he was rooting for the Miami Hurricanes as they won their first national championship. Two years after that, he cheered on the Miami Dolphins during their run to the Super Bowl.

Almost 40 years later, things have come full circle as the University of Miami, the Miami Dolphins, and the Miami Dolphins Foundation, are now rooting for Dr. Penedo and his groundbreaking work at Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center, a part of UHealth – University of Miami Health System.

In recognition of his accomplishments in the field of cancer survivorship and psychosocial oncology, Dr. Penedo was recently inducted during a special ceremony as the inaugural holder of the Sylvester Dolphins Challenge Cancer Living Proof Endowed Chair in Cancer Survivorship. This unique chair, created through a remarkable partnership of the Harcourt M.
and Virginia W. Sylvester Foundation and Dolphins Challenge Cancer, combines the efforts of many into a greater unified impact.

“Tonight, we recognize the talent and achievements of Dr. Frank Penedo,” said University of Miami President Julio Frenk. “I am thrilled that in recognition of your ongoing accomplishments, you will be the holder of the Sylvester Dolphins Challenge Cancer Living Proof Endowed Chair in Cancer Survivorship.”

An internationally recognized expert, Dr. Penedo has dedicated his life to increasing the understanding that fighting cancer is a lifelong journey, with a series of emotional, physical, and social challenges that affect not only the patient but the family and caregivers as well. His survivorship research aims to better understand and treat the full impact of cancer.

“I am humbled and honored to receive this endowed chair,” said Dr. Penedo, who is the center associate director for Cancer Survivorship and Translational Behavioral Science, director of Cancer Survivorship and Supportive Care, and co-leader of the Cancer Control Research Program at Sylvester. Dr. Penedo is also a professor in the Departments of Psychology and Medicine at the University's College of Arts and Sciences and Miller School of Medicine, respectively.

"This endowment is less about me and more about three amazing
pillars of our community that have made this possible: the Harcourt M. and Virginia W. Sylvester Foundation, the Dolphins organization, and Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center,” he said. “I am so grateful that they have chosen me to conduct this mission.”

**Scholar, Leader, and Mentor**

Dr. Penedo received his Ph.D. in clinical health psychology at the University of Miami and completed a fellowship in psychosocial oncology and behavioral medicine at Sylvester and the Department of Psychology.

Leonidas G. Bachas, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, noted that Dr. Penedo is a prolific scholar and leader in his field, and a gifted mentor to the next generation of researchers.

“I am honored to count Frank as a colleague in the College of Arts and Sciences, and delighted that he is being honored with the Sylvester Dolphins Challenge Cancer Living Proof Endowed Chair in Cancer Survivorship,” he said.

Dr. Penedo served on the University’s faculty from 2000 until 2012, when he took on a leadership position at the Feinberg School of Medicine at Northwestern University in Chicago, where he created the first cancer survivorship institute in the U.S. and held the Roswell Park Endowed Chair in Medical Social Sciences. Since returning to Sylvester in 2018, he has made remarkable progress in survivorship research and clinical efforts and the growth of the Cancer Control Research Program.

He has established one of the nation's most robust programs for monitoring patient-reported outcomes to manage patient symptoms, toxicities, and psychosocial needs. Dr. Penedo also
has several NCI-funded grants evaluating the effectiveness of evidence-based psychosocial interventions to address survivorship needs and improve patient outcomes at Sylvester, which is South Florida’s only nationally ranked and NCI-designated cancer center.

Survivorship Research Funding

In addition to developing a survivorship institute that will serve as a nexus for clinical and translational survivorship research at Sylvester, Dr. Penedo leads a portfolio of $14.9 million in extramural funding. The NCI recently awarded him a six-year, $9.8 million grant to study determinants of survivorship experiences and outcomes in the Hispanic/Latino community.

That study is examining how factors such as socioeconomic status, acculturation and other cultural factors, depression, stress, and biological markers of inflammation and ancestry can impact quality of life, disease activity, and overall survival. Cancer is the leading cause of death among Hispanics nationwide, and the country could face a staggering 142% rise in cancer cases by 2030. Sylvester’s catchment area is home to six million people, of whom 44% are Hispanic.

“Endowed chairs allow scholars like Dr. Frank Penedo to continue their groundbreaking research and discover new treatments in perpetuity,” said Jeffrey Duerk, Ph.D., executive vice president for academic affairs and provost of the University. “An academic chair is one of the most important honors our faculty members can receive.”

Sylvester Legacy

Jayne Sylvester Malfitano, who is president and director of
the Sylvester Foundation, a member of the University of Miami Board of Trustees, vice chair of the Sylvester Board of Overseers, and steward of the Sylvester family's incredible legacy, attended the event to personally bestow the honor on Dr. Penedo.

In 1986, Jayne’s father, philanthropist Harcourt Sylvester Jr., pledged $27.5 million to benefit cancer programs at the University of Miami. In recognition of what was then the largest-ever gift to the University, the cancer center was renamed Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center in honor of Mr. Sylvester’s parents, Harcourt Sr. and Virginia.

Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center opened its doors in 1992.

“My family, the foundation, and I are so pleased to support the work you do,” said Ms. Malfitano. “Frank, we are with you on this mission, and we will always be here to support you.”

‘One Team Coming Together’

Dolphins Challenge Cancer began 12 years ago with one goal: to unite the community against one of the world’s most insidious diseases. Today, the DCC is a year-round movement that has raised more than $53.9 million, donating 100% of participant-raised funds to Sylvester.

“This endowed chair represents one team coming together to have greater outcomes for our community,” said Javier Sanchez, executive director of Dolphins Challenge Cancer.” We want this town to win, and to do so we need a cancer center that is second to none. We need doctors and researchers to have the resources they need.
Stephen D. Nimer, M.D., director of Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center and the Oscar de la Renta Endowed Chair in Cancer Research, highlighted the longtime support Sylvester has received from both philanthropic organizations.

“The Sylvester Foundation has been supporting us for 30 years, and the Dolphins have been our partners for the last 12 years,” said Dr. Nimer, who is also executive dean for research at the Miller School. “Sylvester continues its pursuit of excellence. This generous philanthropy allows world-class researchers like Dr. Frank Penedo to accomplish the most impactful research for our community.”