

Symptom tracking is vital to control contagion of COVID-19 in Puerto Rico ^[1]

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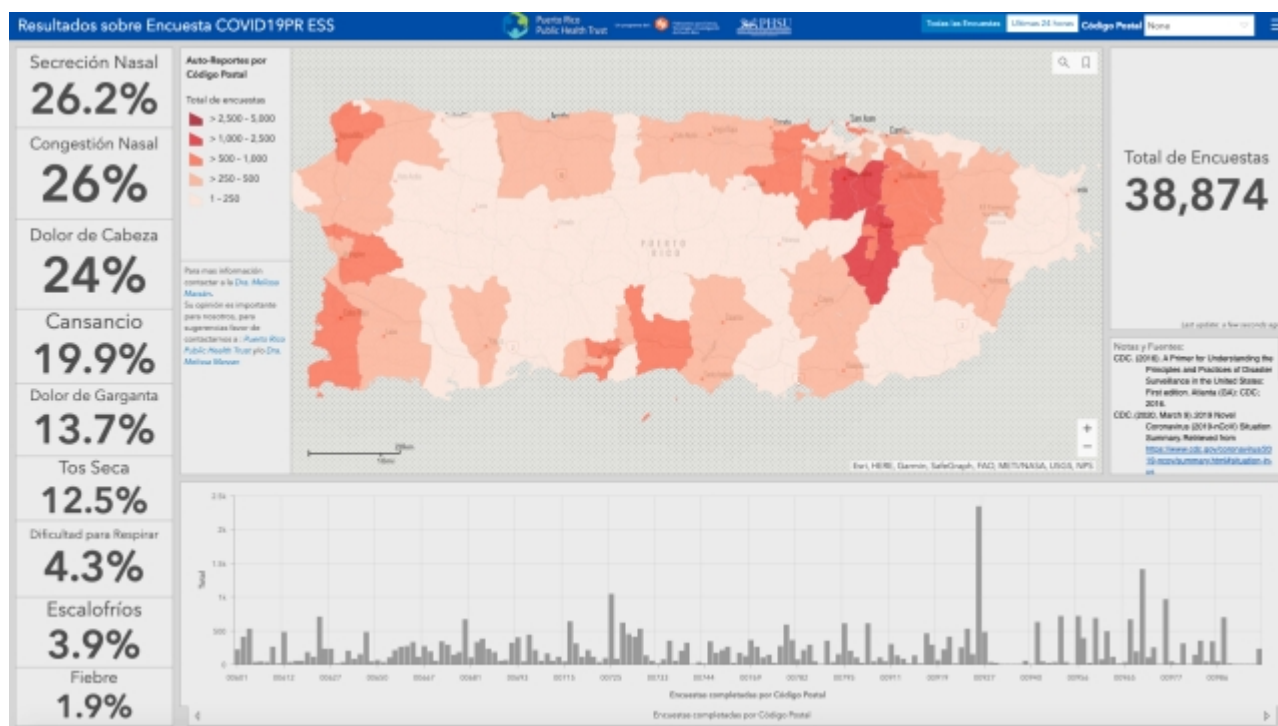
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Coinciding with the first anniversary of the Puerto Rico Public Health Trust (PRPHT), program of the Puerto Rico Science, Technology and Research Trust (PRSTRT); and the celebration of National Public Health Week, PRPHT and Ponce Health Sciences University (PHSU), announce a momentous collaboration amid the coronavirus pandemic. It consists of the creation of the Epidemiological Surveillance System (ESS) platform, which allows the tracking and dissemination of results on the evolution of COVID-19 contagion on the Island. Similarly, Harvard University joined this effort.

Lucy Crespo, CEO of the PRSTRT said: "During this year, the Puerto Rico Public Health Trust has achieved important alliances and collaborations in order to improve the health equity of the communities of Puerto Rico and make health services more accessible. We must highlight that, in the face of the coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic, this collaboration with Ponce Health Sciences University, which allows creating solutions to this epidemic, has been one of the most important".

The ESS of COVID-19, which is a project led by epidemiologist Dr. Melissa Marzán from Ponce Health Sciences University, is a platform designed to track people's symptoms as they arise. The results obtained, through a survey, serve to auscultate the geographic area of ??greatest symptoms, development profiles, present symptoms, days in which symptoms appear, time in which symptoms last and the spread of the virus. This information allows daily monitoring of the development of the novel virus and the prediction of the disease contagion curve to take measures in advance.

"This initiative promotes the "citizen scientist" figure and allows us to monitor the symptoms associated with the virus and identify possible areas of higher incidence of COVID-19. This allows us to plan more effectively the medical and preventive services for the different regions of Puerto

Rico, "said Marzán.

According to official data, since its launch on March 17, 2020, over 38,000 people have participated and the most relevant results show a slight trend of increasing symptoms associated with COVID-19 for the period from March 18 to 26, 2020. What these findings represent for the public is the opportunity to observe the development of symptoms throughout the different areas of the country, to have a closer look to the behavior of the virus in the community and data for future planning of prevention services.

"Data is a powerful tool that allows us to make sound decisions and can prevent the spread of this disease and save lives," said Dr. José Rodríguez Orengo, acting director of PRPHT. "This synergy between PHSU and PRPHT will be the spearhead for scientists to find real and quick solutions to avoid contagion and more deaths from COVID-19 in Puerto Rico. It is important that the community continue to participate of this survey daily and help us control this contagious disease," Rodríguez Orengo concluded.

The PHSU and PRPHT will continue to develop and promote the ESS and have already confirmed that it will be used in other cities in the United States, such as Boston, Massachusetts and Tampa, Florida, among others.

In its first year of establishment, PRPHT has developed community impact programs and projects that include the creation of the Technical Assistance Center of the Puerto Rico Hurricane Response Center (PR-HRHTAC), which offers training to first responders to disasters and with their staff and the IT team of the PRSTRT they created the ESS platform; and the alliance with the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO), which supports the health system of Puerto Rico with professional employees. In addition, its Community Liaison Program works with community leaders to provide solutions and services to the population, such as the Efforts in the South initiative, through which a program of aid visits was made after the earthquakes. Also, the PRPHT launched a mental health campaign with the *Reverdece tú También* program aimed at emotional resilience; and recently they created the *Achú* Activity Book, to explain to children in a simple and fun way what Coronavirus is and how to prevent it. Other programs include a project sponsored by the Medtronic Foundation that offers community aid to several disadvantaged towns in Puerto Rico. In recent days, the start of a new Telemedicine and Telehealth program was announced; and new initiatives are on its way including the announcement of a \$ 80,000 Grant Plan for public health research.

During the National Public Health week that takes place from April 6 to 10, 2020; the PRPHT will share important information related to COVID-19 among other topics in the form of blogs, articles, virtual workshops, among others.

For more information about the PRPHT and the available resources related to COVID-19 you can visit www.paralasaludpublica.org [2]

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