

“The Cancer Monologues”

A Comedy That Promotes Chicano Health

Closing the Gap, First Summit Packs the House • January/February 2003

“What’s so funny about cancer? For the answer, go see “The Cancer Monologues,” a production of Denver’s El Centro Su Teatro and the Greater Denver Latino Cancer Prevention/Control Network. With honesty, sensitivity, and humor, the group presents a series of skits that portray women and men facing breast, prostate, and lung cancer. Summit participants were treated to an English-language performance, but the group also presents Spanish-language and bilingual versions as it travels around the country.

Written by Su Teatro’s artistic director Tony Garcia, “The Cancer Monologues” is the first installment of a five-year cancer awareness program sponsored by the Latino/a Research and Policy Center at the University of Colorado at Denver under a grant from the National Cancer Institute. The group says that the play builds on the Latino traditions of challenging one’s fears and using humor to triumph over sadness.

A Chicano/Latino cultural arts group dedicated to sustaining and developing Chicano and Latino communities through art, music, and theater, Su Teatro was charged by University of Colorado professor Estevan Flores and project director Paula Espinosa with creating a cancer awareness production accessible to the community. In developing the script, Su Teatro relied on up-to-date research on cancer and health behavior, but realized that neither a clinical dis-

cussion or another “disease of the month” production would engage its audience.

The result is a play that drew on the expertise of cancer researchers, Latino cancer prevention staff, director Phil Luna, and actors Magally Rima, Hugo Carbajal, Laura Chavez, and Valerie Bustos. It gives the audience an introduction to the social and cultural issues surrounding cancer as a way to spark conversation about cancer within the Latino community. Future versions of the play will focus on other aspects of dealing with a cancer diagnosis.

“The Cancer Monologues” premiered at El Centro Su Teatro in January 2001. Afterwards, the audience was invited to talk with the actors and producers about the content, substance, and direction of the play. Su Teatro has made this a part of each performance, with a wide ranging question and discussion period after each play that engages actors, producers, and cancer prevention staff with the audience to provide more specific information about cancer.

Su Teatro performs the play throughout the country, making it easily accessible to those who need it most. The actors go into the community to perform the play at street fairs, churches, schools, and festivals. Before and after the play, the company provides a resource table of cancer prevention materials, available in both English and Spanish.

For more information about “The Cancer Monologues,” call 303-296-0219, or e-mail cancermonologues@suteatro.org

