



## Latin American GIST Coalition in cooperation with the Life Raft Group

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### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **CANCER PATIENT ADVOCATES ANNOUNCE SOLIDARITY AND MISSION IN LATIN AMERICA**

#### **LATIN AMERICAN GIST COALITION PROMOTES *MONTERREY DECLARATION***

**Wayne, NJ, USA**--An historic meeting took place in Monterrey, Mexico from February 2-4, 2010, when a group of cancer patient advocates, called the Latin American GIST Coalition, met for the first time to outline their mission and commitment to promoting the survival of GIST (Gastrointestinal Stromal Tumor) patients in Latin America.

As part of the gathering, the Coalition had an unprecedented meeting with the world's leading GIST researchers who are committed to finding a cure for this rare disease. This encounter with researchers gave the Coalition added inspiration in their endeavor to create a mission to promote survival of GIST patients through information, education, and strategic networking.

The Coalition gathered in a room lined with flags representing ten countries across Latin America and the United States. The circle of flags symbolized the unity among the patient community and its belief that change can only be achieved through solidarity.

Important alliances were achieved, including one with the Tecnológico de Monterrey, an institution committed to the development of the first center for cancer research in Mexico, and another with The Max Foundation and the Life Raft Group, organizations dedicated to improving the lives and survival rates of patients with rare cancers worldwide. These alliances will provide a number of resources to help the Coalition identify and reach GIST patients and disseminate information and education into Latin America. Rodrigo Salas, the Mexican representative of the Coalition, summed up the purpose of the meeting and resulting alliances as "an extraordinary historic event paired with expertise from our partnership organizations to strengthen our efforts at promoting survival of GIST patients."

The meeting reached its climax when the Coalition proudly announced their plan to promote survival of GIST patients, which they called the *Monterrey Declaration*, focused on four key principles:

- To improve the knowledge of patients and physicians.
- To increase patient access to adequate treatment and resources.
- To support local patient support organizations, including the creation of new ones.
- To encourage collaboration and coordination with the physician community.

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**For more information:** <http://www.liferaftgroup.org/newsroom.html>



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With its goals in place, the Coalition adjourned to their respective home countries as pro-active members of a new cancer awareness movement, planning to meet again in the near future.

### **More about the Latin American GIST Coalition:**

*A partnership of patient advocates representing ten Latin American countries that has convened to create the Latin American GIST Initiative for the GIST community. The following Coalition members were present at the Monterrey meeting: Sandra Mesri of Argentina, Vicky Ossio of Bolivia, Dr. Alexandre Sakano of Brazil, Piga Fernandez Kaempffer of Chile, Dr. Rafael Vega of Colombia, Rafael Becerra of Colombia, Michael Josephy of Costa Rica, Alejandro Miranda of the Dominican Republic, Rodrigo Salas of Mexico, Maria Isabel Gomez de Soriano of Venezuela, Norman Scherzer of the Life Raft Group and Pat Garcia-Gonzalez of The Max Foundation.*

### **More about GIST:**

*GISTs belong to a group of rare cancers called soft tissue sarcomas that can occur in connective tissues, bones, muscles, fat, nerves, blood vessels, and cartilage. About 40-70% of GISTs originate in the stomach, 20-40% in the small intestine, and 5-15% in the colon and rectum. In 2000 scientists discovered a way to properly diagnose GISTs by testing for a mutation in the C-Kit gene. That same year the introduction of Gleevec® (imatinib mesylate), a molecularly targeted drug specific to the C-Kit gene resulted in an 85% response by GIST patients who had previously had few effective treatment options. With patients now developing resistance to Gleevec® LRG is racing against the drug resistance clock to find new treatments to save their lives.*