UW Health: Patient navigator adapts to COVID-19 to promote cancer screenings

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MADISON, Wis. – UW Health continues to caution the public that cancer does not wait for a pandemic to end. Screenings are just as important as ever, which is why Ana Karina Burton, a patient navigator at UW Health, has needed to get creative in recent months.

It is Burton's job to connect with people, often those who are uninsured, across 12 counties in southwestern Wisconsin to guide them through breast and cervical cancer screenings. Her role is closely connected to the Wisconsin Well Woman Program, which provides free breast and cervical cancer screenings for women with limited income and little or no health insurance. Burton often makes screening appointments for patients directly, and if they are diagnosed with cancer, she continues to support them through diagnosis and treatment; ensuring they can travel to appointments.

Before COVID-19, she would travel throughout these counties, visiting clinics in rural communities to build relationships with patients in person, or she would host a booth and meet people at events. When clinics closed and events were canceled, her job became more challenging.

"I had to find out who was visiting and contacting these clinics so I could reach out to them from afar," said Ana Karina Burton, UW Health patient navigator. "I started calling everyone I could, I started writing letters and emails to build relationships any way I could."

She has also gotten creative in other ways. She partners with community

organizations, county services, and supportive services such as food banks to deliver cancer screening information alongside food or school supplies.

While she misses working with patients face-to-face, she is still making a positive change in their lives which the patients and UW Health appreciate.