

Wisconsin Medicine: Livestream on reducing the risks to women's health

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MADISON, WI (September 2, 2020) — “My dream,” says Lisa Barroilhet, “is to never tell anyone’s mother, daughter, or sister that she has cancer.”

During the Wisconsin Medicine Livestream event on September 1, Barroilhet, an assistant professor of medicine at the UW’s School of Medicine and Public Health (SMPH) and faculty fellow in gynecological oncology, told of her passion for ending cancer and especially cancers that afflict women. She was part of a panel that included Laurel Rice, chair of the department of Obstetrics and Gynecology; Lee Gravatt Wilke, chair of the Division of General Surgery and director of the UW Health Breast Center; and Heidi Brown, associate division director of female pelvic medicine and reconstructive surgery. Hosted by SMPH dean Robert Golden, the panel discussed ways that the UW is working to address the health risks that women face.

Rice noted that women’s health is poorly addressed in the United States. “The mission of [our women’s health] center can’t be overstated,” she said. “The United States has the highest rate of maternal deaths when compared to 10 other Western countries. If you have a baby in the United States, you have a twofold risk of death when compared to France.”

Several panel members discussed the cancers that primarily affect women. Wilke described several active studies aimed at improving cancer discovery and treatment, studies that draw on the skills of a wide variety of professionals. “Here at the UW, we’ve built an amazing team of genetic counselors, breast surgeons, plastic surgeons to prevent a woman from getting a new breast cancer,” she said.

The panel also covered issues separate from cancers. Brown described one of the most common causes of women's health issues: pelvic floor disorders. Approximately a quarter of women will suffer a pelvic floor disorder before the age of 45 and more than half by age 65. "When the pelvic floor isn't working properly, it can have a dramatic negative effect on quality of life," she said.

Barroilhet described the research going on in her lab, which is looking into a cancer-fighting drug called atovaquone. Discovery, she said, "is why we as scientists get out of bed in the morning."

Golden brought forward questions from some of the hundreds of viewers who watched the event live on YouTube. And Rice emphasized the message that all the doctors on the panel wished to communicate: "We are leading the way in women's health. There is no doubt about that," she said. "But we are not satisfied. We have dreams. We want to turn those dreams into reality."

To hear more from Rice and the members of the panel, view a recording of [Wisconsin Medicine](#). The series is offered via YouTube and will continue into the fall. The next event will be September 15 and will cover efforts to combat Alzheimer's disease.