

# UW Health: Recognizes nurse practitioner caring for breast cancer patients as Healthcare Hero

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MADISON, Wis. – Like many nurse practitioners, Loyda Braithwaite had a desire to work in healthcare since childhood – but her story has a different beginning.

Braithwaite was born and raised in a small town in Panama. She earned her degree in nursing at the University of Panama. She says her passion for cancer care also started early, at the Panamanian National Oncologic Institute during her undergraduate studies.

“One of my professors was the only oncology-specialized nurse in Panama at the time,” Braithwaite said. “Since then, I knew oncology was my calling, and it inspired me to continue my career and knowledge in nursing.”

Braithwaite met her now husband, who was an American Peace Corps volunteer serving in Panama, and they moved to the United States in 2009.

“I didn’t know any English at that time,” she said. “With dedication and persistence, I learned English, obtained my nursing license in the United States and began practicing as a registered nurse in 2010.”

She went on to earn a Master of Science degree in nursing at Loyola University Chicago in 2015, specializing in oncology. She began working as an oncology nurse practitioner at the UW Carbone Cancer Center, and has specialized in caring for patients with breast cancer for the last three years.

“I celebrate the happy moments with our patients and families, and I support them through difficult times,” she said. “The purpose of my work is to make their journey

more manageable. My patients are daily reminders that I have chosen the right profession.”

Loyda is a passionate healthcare worker and advocate inside and outside of the Carbone Cancer Center. She has returned to Panama over the years to assist in orthopedic surgeries, but her service in Central America has grown.

She also helped develop and conduct an educational program for oncology nurses in Honduras, in collaboration with Health Volunteer Overseas and the American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO). She provided rural general practice care in the Dominican Republic and volunteered with the Oncology Nursing Society and ASCO to provide oncology nursing education in Colombia and Ghana. Braithwaite is also a member of the Oncology Nursing Certification Corporation’s committee that evaluates the learning needs for the oncology nurse practitioners’ national certification test.

Locally, she volunteers as a co-facilitator for a Hispanic breast cancer support group at the Catholic Multicultural Center, a social services agency in Madison assisting people in need.

Beyond all she has done, to serve the community at home and abroad, she has a strong desire to learn more, Braithwaite said.

“I wanted to make a larger impact for my patients, colleagues and the profession. I am currently a PhD student in the UW-Madison School of Nursing,” she said. “As a future nurse scientist, I want to focus my research on cancer health needs in minority populations.”

For someone who has accomplished so much, humility is still critical to her and that comes from her patients, Braithwaite said.

“I’ve learned it’s always best to meet patients where they are, never where I think they should be,” she said. “No matter what I think I know, I always need to listen to my patients first, and that’s very important to me as a professional.”

UW Health honors advanced practice providers like Braithwaite this week for the inaugural National APP Week, which honors the contributions of physician assistants, nurse practitioners, certified registered nurse anesthetists, clinical nurse specialists and certified nurse-midwives.