

## **Passion Profile: Dr. Bianca Ferrari and Cancer Care in SW Florida**

By Lee Health

For Dr. Bianca Ferrari, patients are always the most important thing. But passion runs a close second.

Dr. Ferrari, a hematologist-oncologist with Lee Physician Group, is part of an ongoing movement at the Regional Cancer Center to redefine cancer care in Southwest Florida. The movement pushes education and empowerment, compassion and community, and exceptional service.

Devoted doctors, nurses, and a united team of caregivers live and breathe cancer – it's their calling – but they also want to spread the word about how patients will get everything here that they would expect at a hospital such as Moffitt, The Mayo Clinic, or Johns Hopkins.

"You don't need to go to Tampa or Miami to get the best care," Dr. Ferrari says. "Patients should be able to get the care they need, right here in your backyard. People will get world-class care, with similar outcomes that they would anywhere else."

But it's the personal touch – that special spark of passion -- that separates RCC from the pack.

The latest advancement from the Regional Cancer Center is designed to change the way our community thinks, perhaps boiling everything down to these simple words: We've got this.

### **New Cancer Floor at Gulf Coast Medical Center: Aug. 19**

The Regional Cancer Center – a program that combines major medical players in the area such as Lee Health, 21<sup>st</sup> Century Oncology, and Florida Cancer Specialists – coordinates team-based care for its patients.

Inside a current outpatient building at the Sanctuary campus on Colonial Boulevard in Fort Myers, RCC doctors and staff employ the latest treatments, targeted therapies, technological advancements, one-on-one counseling, and much more.

But starting Aug. 19, the RCC will add a vital piece of the cancer puzzle: A brand-new, dedicated cancer floor at Gulf Coast Medical Center in South Fort Myers. The 7<sup>th</sup> floor cancer wing is part of the hospital's major expansion project to help meet community needs.

This central location – a hospital within a hospital -- means easier access for patients all around the region as well as more comfort, spacious rooms with plenty of sunlight, and a space solely dedicated to cancer surgery, ICU, therapy treatments, and general cancer care.

### **Convenience, Technology, and Teamwork – All in One Spot**

Another defining feature? Patients no longer have to drive all over town to other clinics. With the ability to test, diagnose and treat – sometimes within the very same day, Gulf Coast Medical Center's 7<sup>th</sup> floor serves as the focal point of a progressive regional program.

"The best move was not to build a whole new building but to expand upon what we have and solidify cancer care to one location and one campus," says Dr. Ferrari, adding that patients will get specialized treatment the moment they walk through the doors of Gulf Coast.

“We’re trying to make cancer care more patient-centered,” Dr. Ferrari says. “We address their concerns and get them in a good place to make their own decisions after discussion with a team. We have multiple disciplines of medicine together with patients and their support system. We always ask the patients to involve anyone they want in their decisions.

“The message is: This is not about us, this about them, so whatever works for them.”

The 7<sup>th</sup> floor also features larger meeting space and cutting-edge technology so doctors can remote in no matter where they may be. This spurs immediate discussion to get care plans enacted as soon as possible. And as fast as technology changes, the floor is designed to seamlessly adapt.

It’s a bit like a cancer war room.

“We chose GCMC because we can involve more people and more conferences across the facilities,” Dr. Ferrari says. “The more people involved at the same time, the better the care as opposed to relying on sending messages multiple different ways.”

### **Specific Services**

The Regional Cancer Center at Gulf Coast Medical Center provides:

- New operating rooms for cancer surgery
- Inpatient chemotherapy
- Examination rooms
- Onsite testing
- ER doctors with special cancer training
- Supportive care for toxicity and other complications from treatment
- Intensive Care Units strictly for cancer patients
- Surgical robots for less invasive procedures

A special highlight of these services is the heart and soul of personalized care—an expanded nurse navigator program.

“From a nurse navigator to meet the patient in the hospitals and help them go through the whole landscape, this is so important,” Dr. Ferrari says. “Navigators help patients make the transition from when they are first diagnosed and walk them through scans, specialties, tests—holding hands with patients, helping them understand and know where to be at any given time.”

Feeling overwhelmed and scared -- a cancer diagnosis can be a complicated time. So navigators help take stress away and manage the care plan.

“There are so many questions, so the navigators manage those frustrations and help patients understand what the expectations are. The navigators are that bridge—they help patients with a timeline, how to prepare for tests, and they identify barriers to care,” says Dr. Ferrari, adding that navigators also tackle transportation and insurance questions to minimize roadblocks.

### **It’s Personal**

Born and raised in Brazil, Dr. Ferrari, after graduating from medical school, completed her residency and fellowship in Michigan and practiced there for seven years. In 2017 she moved to Florida “in pursuit of paradise.”

“The winters last forever (in Michigan). When they called me, I felt that this was where I needed to be for my next step,” she says. “Starting something from scratch, changing a culture of cancer care for the entire community was appealing to me.”

All the cancer providers at the Regional Cancer Center share her vision.

And now she hopes the community will buy in to the message as the 7<sup>th</sup> floor at Gulf Coast Medical Center gets set for opening.

“Unfortunately, the community doesn’t always know what we provide,” she says. “So many times we have patients go to Moffitt or other places for a second opinion, and they come back saying, ‘Yeah, doc—they would do the same thing you’re doing.’

“It’s good for them to see that the comfort of their own home, no travel, no stress, is right here.”

### **More Than Just a Career**

Dr. Ferrari is quick to point out that, like other cancer doctors, she didn’t choose oncology as a career. It chose her.

“I don’t see myself as anything other than an oncologist. It’s not just what I do—it’s who I am. I want to see that kind of passion translated to my patients and to their families,” she says. “I want them to know that with the support of this cancer program has to offer us, we can take them to wherever they need to be in their cancer journey comfortably.

“This team is dedicated to oncology. Everybody’s waiting to greet the patients with a smile at any point that they have to be. We’re here for them with open arms.”

-----END-----