
SAVING

VIDAS



Meet Myriam Escobar, a champion of life-saving change. Myriam is a Community Outreach Worker with the Moffitt Diversity Department's Yo Me Cuido® program, a Latina breast health education project.

Recently, she was one of only eight individuals nationwide honored at the White House as a "Champion of Change." She was recognized by the president for her work inspiring healthy changes among Hispanic women.

INTERVIEWER: With all of the breast cancer awareness groups, rallies, fundraising events and news stories that take place every day, is there still a lack of information that is reaching the Hispanic community?

MYRIAM ESCOBAR: Yes, there is still a need for information among the Hispanic community, because of different factors. Some are cultural – simply because the families of these women never spoke about the subject. There is also a lack of interest, because they consider their work more important and they are afraid of losing it, they spend a lot of time with their families and always put themselves last. When they hear us saying that they need to come first to take care of their health so they can help their families, they start realizing they are important.

INTERVIEWER: Statistics show that Hispanic women are more likely to be diagnosed at the later stages of breast cancer. What are your thoughts on why this is so?

MYRIAM: It's true, statistics clearly show that and the reality is that we are diagnosed in the later stages of the disease because we put ourselves last. We don't [typically] believe in early prevention and we go to the doctor when we are sick, and in many cases when it's too late.

INTERVIEWER: When did you first realize you wanted to reach out to the Hispanic community in this way? Did something in your own life prompt this?



MYRIAM ESCOBAR
Moffitt M-POWER

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- FOR ME IT IS SO IMPORTANT THAT WOMEN UNDERSTAND THE IMPORTANCE OF PREVENTION.

MYRIAM: I have worked my whole life with communities in different areas. But in 2008, my sister-in-law died of breast cancer. We were like sisters and she fought a long battle for 9 years against cancer. And all because she didn't pay attention to the symptoms. That's why for me it is so important that women understand the importance of prevention because, like in the case of my sister-in-law, she shouldn't have died because she didn't have information about how to prevent it.

INTERVIEWER: This outreach program has gotten a lot of national attention and is growing beyond the Tampa Bay area. How is that progress coming along?

MYRIAM: We have been in different counties and we want Yo Me Cuido® to reach the entire nation. It is our dream that all Hispanic women can get this information in their language, because that's what makes this program so successful. We hope to get outside the Tampa area, reach the whole Florida and eventually all the states of the nation.

INTERVIEWER: Educating the community is Yo Me Cuido®'s first step. How important is the individual's first step, examination?

MYRIAM: A lot, because when they start understanding the importance of prevention, they realize it's not just about hearing the message but about taking action. We help them a lot in that sense, because we start calling them, sending them emails and postcards reminding them of the mammograms and once they do it their fears vanish and they keep doing it year after year.

INTERVIEWER: Are you seeing a new sense of empowerment among these women you've met?

MYRIAM: Yes, definitely yes. A large percentage of these women come out of the class motivated, and the women know they have in their hands the power to change not only their own lives but those of their family.

INTERVIEWER: One day you're here in Tampa, working with a group of women in their homes. The next day you're at the White House being honored by the President of The United States. What was this like for you?

MYRIAM: First, it was surprising because we never expected something of this magnitude. We are a small department with the funds we have to do what we can. [It was] an honor and above all a great opportunity.

INTERVIEWER: How many people have participated in the Yo Me Cuido® program to date?

MYRIAM: To date, we have educated more than 2,000 women and I can tell you with certitude there are at least 2,100. From those 2,100, 48 percent of the women over age 40 have had their mammograms done - and there is a large percentage that doesn't show up in any statistics because it's very difficult to follow the number of women who have their mammograms done as the result of a reference. Many women call me and say "I am a friend of someone who went to Yo Me Cuido®."

INTERVIEWER: Prior to working at Moffitt, you were a bus driver for the school system. How did that experience help you get hired at Moffitt?

MYRIAM: I always say that God puts His hands in all these things. A month before my sister-in-law died, someone called me and told me that Moffitt was going to offer mammograms, and at that time I didn't have any [health] insurance. I called and made an appointment for my mammogram. When I got there the person who helped me with the application seemed so nice and I got the courage to ask if there was a position

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available at Moffitt. I didn't like my job and I already knew Moffitt, and I loved it because I could tell that when my sister-in-law went there she felt at home. For her, Moffitt was her lifeline for 9 years. I dreamed about working at Moffitt. Then they asked me if I had a driver's license, because they were looking for a person to drive the bus and also to help with the applications, and that's how I got to know the community little by little. Two years later they retired the mobile unit and that's when Yo Me Cuido® was born. One thing led to the next: the day after my sister-in-law died, I was working at Moffitt. These are God's things. Now I'm here and at every class we teach I know she's there with us. Her fight was not in vain.

INTERVIEWER: Is there anything else you'd like to add?

MYRIAM: I think it is very important to mention that the program has been funded by The American Cancer Society and by Walmart Foundation. We are running the fourth phase of the program from September 1st through end of August of 2014. There is a new ingredient in the program, nutrition, which we are going to treat in depth, so we can start changing certain habits regarding the nutrition of our families. 🍷

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