KERN NATIONAL NETWORK
FOR FLOURISHING IN MEDICINE
Character. Caring. Practical Wisdom.

Getting to Know...

Mayra Betancourt Ponce, Medical Student
University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health (UWSMPH)

Q: Please tell us about yourself.



Betancourt Ponce: I'm a sixth-year MD/PhD student at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. My thesis work explores the effects of oxidative phosphorylation inhibition on solid tumors. I aim to become an academic dermatologist with a research lab focused on developing and refining therapies for skin malignancies. I grew up in San Juan, Puerto Rico, where I completed a bachelor's degree in Cellular and Molecular Biology at the University of Puerto Rico before moving to Wisconsin. My interests in medical humanities and narrative medicine led me to start a project called *What Brings You in Today?* (WBYIT), which in turn led me to the KNN!

Q: How did you get involved with the KNN? What about the mission, vision or values resonate with you?

Betancourt Ponce: With the KNN's support, I helped establish WBYIT, a student-run narrative medicine podcast at the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health. I have also participated in their *Becoming* series and annual conferences, through which I have presented my work and met some of the KNN's wonderful members. I appreciate that the KNN highlights the humanity within medicine through its values and initiatives, which is something I'm drawn to and want to be a part of.



Mayra Betancourt Ponce and Dr. Leigh Berman, co-founders of What Brings You in Today?

Q: What most excites you about work you have done or are currently doing to advance flourishing in medicine?

Betancourt Ponce: I'm happy to have helped create a space for much-needed creativity and connection in medical education and practice. In the podcast, we use storytelling to discuss crucial topics related to medicine that are not usually talked about, such as confronting death and failure, the impact of mentorship, mental health and many others. We welcome a diversity of guests in different roles and life stages and get to learn from their perspectives and experiences on these topics. Along with my co-founder Dr. Leigh Berman, I want to acknowledge Haley Strouf Motley, Anqi Gao, Kya Vaughn and Beth Merkel for continuing this work and being amazing co-hosts and leaders. I'm also proud that our team has grown throughout the years to over a dozen medical and undergraduate students.

Q: What examples of flourishing have you witnessed at your institution? What supports flourishing in that environment?

Betancourt Ponce: I'm always so amazed by the passion and hard work that student leaders put into their projects and organizations. Many entail a sense of awareness to the needs and wants of their communities, drive, teamwork and other skills that are essential to the practice of medicine. Collaboration and support from different members of the school community (e.g., other students, faculty, administrators) help these projects and students flourish.

Q: Outside of school/work, what allows you to flourish?

Betancourt Ponce: Being surrounded by a strong community of friends and family. Throughout my training, I have made it a priority to allow time to nurture the relationships that I care about and to cultivate a life that I enjoy. I also prioritize my mental and physical well-being through exercise, nutrition and mindfulness.

Q: What are your hopes for the future of medicine and healthcare?

Betancourt Ponce: I have a lot of hopes for the future of medicine. My biggest hope is that healthcare becomes accessible and welcoming to everyone. Some of the ways of doing so are by continuing to support a diverse and inclusive workforce that creates environments that better serve our patients and by emphasizing community-driven work.



Mayra Betancourt Ponce at the 2023 KNN Conference with fellow UWSMPH students Beth Merkel, Sofia Nehring Firmino and Andrew Matta.

Q: Anything else you would like to share?

Betancourt Ponce: I feel very fortunate to have found the KNN and to be inspired by the things that their members are doing. I'm also very grateful for the support that WBYIT has received and feel motivated to keep growing this project. We always welcome new ideas and collaborations, so feel free to reach out anytime at wbyitpodcast@gmail.com or through our Instagram (@wbyit_uwsmph). ■