

Maribel Guzman's cancer journey moved her from fear to hope

Surgeon's words provided the encouragement this breast cancer survivor needed

ROME, GA., Oct. 12, 2026 – For years, Maribel Guzman would drive past the Harbin Clinic Cancer Center on her way to work and feel sympathy for the people inside.

"I hate it for those people who are getting a cancer diagnosis," she remembered thinking. "Once you have cancer, you are doomed."

Then, in 2022, she became one of those people.

Today Guzman is a breast cancer survivor. Her portrait and story are featured in the Faces of Hope gallery at the Harbin Clinic Cancer Center, where cancer patients share their stories to encourage others.

October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month, and Guzman's message is that while a cancer diagnosis can be scary, it's not the end of your story.

Guzman was attending a routine mammogram when she mentioned an area of hardness she had noticed in her breast.

"I didn't think that it was anything, but because I was already there, I decided to mention it," she said.

Additional testing quickly followed. A radiologist encouraged her to have a biopsy performed immediately.

"If you were one of my family members, I would stay for a biopsy," he told her.

Within days, Guzman learned she had breast cancer.

As a single mother raising a son and two daughters, fear immediately set in.

"When you are in that position, it is easy to be negative. My mind kept thinking about the worst-case scenario," she said.

"I didn't think I could make any plans for the future."

That changed when she met surgeon Dr. Paul Brock Jr.

Before discussing treatment details, he asked if she had any questions.

"I just wanted to know if I even had a chance," she said.

"If you didn't have a chance, you wouldn't be here with me," he told her.

The statement transformed her outlook.

"It was at that moment that cancer was no longer a death sentence to me," she said.

Her treatment plan included chemotherapy, surgery, radiation, immunotherapy and hormone-blocking medications under the care of Dr. Melissa Dillmon.

Throughout treatment, Guzman leaned heavily on her faith.

"I didn't necessarily think that I was a strong person," she said. "Looking back, I know the reason I was able to endure so much is because I was never alone."

Today, her daughters are older, and she said cancer changed all of them.

"They are very strong and more resilient," she said.

Now when she drives past the Cancer Center, she sees something entirely different.

"I used to think that if you were in that building, you had no hope," she said. "Now I see a building of opportunity."

About Atrium Health Floyd and Harbin Clinic

With a more than 150-year history of serving the needs of patients and communities, the [Atrium Health Floyd](#) and Harbin Clinic family of health care services are a leading medical provider and economic force in northwest Georgia and northeast Alabama. More than 5,200 teammates at Atrium Health Floyd and Harbin Clinic provide care throughout the region, offering more than 40 medical specialties at its hospitals in Rome and Cedartown, Georgia, and Centre, Alabama. It is part of Charlotte, North Carolina-based [Advocate Health](#), the nation's third-largest nonprofit integrated health system with [Wake Forest University School of Medicine](#) as its academic core. Patients have access to the resources of a preeminent academic health system at the forefront of clinical excellence, innovation and research. Nationally recognized for expertise in heart and vascular, neurosciences, oncology, pediatrics and rehabilitation, Advocate Health is also a pioneer in the delivery of virtual health care. It's accelerating discovery by making research participation part of the standard-of-care through its one-of-a-kind [National Center for Clinical Trials](#), plus two affiliated life-sciences-focused innovation districts and is home to one of the nation's largest graduate medical education programs, with an experiential learning focus and specialized residencies to help protect the long-term sustainability of rural health care in America.

About Advocate Health

Headquartered in Charlotte, North Carolina, [Advocate Health](#) is the third-largest nonprofit, integrated health system in the United States. A preeminent academic health system at the forefront of clinical excellence, innovation and research, it delivers care under the names [Advocate Health Care](#) in Illinois and Indiana; [Atrium Health](#) in the Carolinas, Georgia and Alabama; and [Aurora Health Care](#) in Wisconsin and Michigan and [Wake Forest University School of Medicine](#) is its academic core. Nationally recognized for expertise in heart and vascular, neurosciences, oncology, pediatrics and rehabilitation, Advocate Health is also a pioneer in the delivery of virtual health care. It is accelerating discovery by making research participation part of the standard-of-care through its one-of-a-kind [National Center for Clinical Trials](#), plus two affiliated life-sciences-focused innovation districts and one of the nation's largest graduate medical education programs. With more than 165,000 teammates serving patients at 69 hospitals and over 1,000 care locations across eight states, Advocate Health reinvests over \$6 billion each year to improve community health, making it one of the nation's largest providers of community benefit.

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