“I have a specialist for every part of my body,” Mickie Bowe says with a smile, and that may not be an exaggeration. Mickie’s list of physical challenges is daunting, starting with lifelong fibromyalgia and migraine headaches, a pulmonary embolism that led to life-long anticoagulation, a traumatic brain injury and PTSD following a car accident, a hysterectomy that led to a hematoma and the subsequent discovery of a kidney tumor, thyroid cancer, vocal cord paralysis, and throat reconstruction. In the last decade, she has endured 35 major surgeries.

The mother of four children, ages 17-29, Mickie says she can’t remember feeling good other than when she was pregnant. Despite the health challenges she has faced, she owned and operated a mortgage company for 10 years and inspired by her English bulldog, Ruckus — who is so important to her well-being that he has stayed in her room each time she has been hospitalized — she formed a greeting card company to support rescue efforts for the breed. (She also organizes events for the Portland English Bulldog Association via the Meetup website.)

Mickie has been medically retired since 2014, but as a 30-year member of Kaiser Permanente (KP), she spends many hours as a volunteer patient partner in KP and Kaiser Permanente Northwest (KPNW) groups. A resident of Hillsboro, Oregon, she is the co-chair of the KPNW Westside Patient and Family Advisory Council, a member of the Westside Care Experience Group and Sunset Clinic Care Council, a member of the National Kaiser Permanente Person/Family Centered Care Leadership Team, and an expert in person and family centered care (PFCC).

Her many years in various roles as a patient have equipped Mickie with self-advocacy skills that she shares with others. “I have learned how to talk to doctors and how to ask them questions so that they answer them in layman terms,” she explains. “I’ve learned not to take ‘no’ for an answer. I’ve learned to push for what I need but not push so far that my doctors don’t trust me. I have gone with others to their appointments to advocate for them. I get calls all the time for help.”

Mickie joined the PORTAL Patient Engagement Council in March 2018. The skills she has gained in recent years as a patient partner complement its work and she is excited to share those skills in this new setting, in particular because of the emphasis on patient-centered research.