UPMC
LIFE CHANGING MEDICINE

Palliative Research CENTER PaRC

August 2024

Palliative Care News

Message from Jane and Yael

As we kick off a new year, we celebrate team building within the Section of Palliative Care and Medical Ethics and Palliative Research Center (PaRC).

In this edition of our newsletter, we welcome a new class of palliative care fellows. We also highlight our innovative programs, including the newly established Palliative Care service line and events like our Section retreat dedicated to teamwork. We recognize our research accomplishments from the American Academy of Hospice and Palliative Medicine (AAHPM) and newly funded projects spanning palliative care education for frontline providers. We also cheer on our many team members across various disciplines for their awards and accomplishments this year.

Jane Schell, MD

Section chief, Palliative Care and Medical Ethics
Medical director, UPMC Palliative and Supportive Institute

Yael Schenker, MD

Associate chief of research, Section of Palliative Care and Medical Ethics

Events

Section Retreat

In April, the Section of Palliative Care and Medical Ethics gathered for a team-building retreat on appreciative inquiry, a strength-based approach to brainstorming for change. Cristin McDermott, MD, from Connecticut Children's and the University of Connecticut, led the retreat.

American Academy of Hospice and Palliative Medicine Annual Assembly

The American Academy of Hospice and Palliative Medicine's Annual Assembly and State of the Science conferences took place March 20 to 24 in Phoenix, AZ. The conferences bring together thousands of palliative care clinicians and researchers. The Section of Palliative Care and Medical Ethics and PaRC had a very successful year. PaRC and Section faculty, trainees, mentees, and clinicians presented 24 sessions and posters.

Hitoshi Koshiya, MD, from UPMC Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh, won the AAHPM Annual Assembly Early Career/Professional In Training Scholarly Work-in-Progress Study Poster Award for "A National Survey Describing Management Patterns for Pediatric Paroxysmal Sympathetic Hyperactivity (PSH)," with support from mentor **Justin Yu, MD**.

Learn more and view additional event photos

Department of Medicine Research Day

Congratulations to all participants on a job well done.

- "Engaging Black Individuals to Improve Policies Addressing End of Life Care: Preliminary Focus Group Findings" by **Julia Bulova** (from the lab of **Douglas White, MD**).
- "Equity in Using Artificial Intelligence to Target Goals of Care Documentation," by **Gina Piscitello, MD**.
- "Exploring the Meaning of 'A Good Day' for Individuals Living with Advanced Cancer," by **Svea Chang** (from the lab of **Carissa Low, PhD**).
- "Five Year Experience of Concurrent Dialysis and Hospice: Outcomes and Perspectives," by **Alexandra E. Bursic, MD, Natalie C. Ernecoff, PhD**, and **Jane O. Schell, MD**.
- "Perspectives of Family Decision-Makers Around Prolonged Ventilatory Support," by **Amanda Moale, MD**.
- "Pilot Palliative Care Pharmacist-led Opioid Deprescribing Clinic: Feasibility, Safety, and Efficacy," by **Maria F. Lowry, PharmD** (senior author), and **Sydney Lee** (first author).

Palliative Care Fellows Invited Speaker Series

In May, the Section of Palliative Care and Medical Ethics welcomed Nneka Ufere, MD, as the first fellow-invited speaker for Palliative Care Grand Rounds. Dr. Ufere presented "Increasing Healthcare System Empathy of Patients with Cirrhosis: My Top 10 Lessons in Palliative Hepatology."

Rush to Crush Cancer

Amar Bansal, MD, Shannon Joy, MSN, and **Charles T. Mupamombe, MD**, completed the 30-mile bike race benefiting UPMC Hillman Cancer Center in May. They have raised more than $1,300 for the cause to date.

Program Highlights

Service Line Established

The new Palliative Care service line launched in January. The initial meeting brought together stakeholders across the health system to collaborate and identify opportunities to improve quality and access to palliative care across our communities. Surveys that were sent to palliative leadership and site leadership are now being analyzed to determine priorities.

Pomp and Circumstance

Sara, a bubbly, forward-thinking college student, was finishing her last semester at Gonzaga University and about to secure a degree in music education when she became ill. What originally presented as the onset of stroke symptoms ultimately proved to be cardiomyopathy.

Sara and her mother relocated to Pittsburgh to pursue treatment at UPMC. **Tammy Brinker, CRNP**, palliative care, met Sara early on when Sara was an outpatient at the UPMC Heart and Vascular Institute. At the time, Sara was being evaluated for a heart transplant.

Sara had plans, including graduation and teaching, that were quickly interrupted when the transplant proved necessary. Tammy was part of the multidisciplinary team that supported Sara along this path.

"The adjustment to a new normal is key for this population," Tammy says. "Affirmation and validation are so important. Sometimes, we are too quick to label someone as depressed or anxious."

With the guidance of her team and a professor from Carnegie Mellon University, Sara charted a new course for herself.

Because the risk of exposure to infection is high as a teacher, Sara pivoted and secured her undergraduate degree in music. Come fall, she will begin pursuing a master's degree in social work. She hopes to explore working with pediatric transplant patients.

MUSIC THERAPY
IN
PALLIATIVE CARE

MusiCare

Rhiannon Rieger, MMT, music therapist, palliative care, facilitated an enrichment activity for 21 medical students who volunteer with MusiCare. These student volunteers lend their musical talents to small group performances at patient request in various clinical environments.

The students learned about what music therapy is and is not, particularly in the palliative setting. They also learned when to consider patient referrals to board-certified music therapists. Additionally, students participated in a therapeutic music-making experience with drums and other small percussion instruments.

Staff Spotlight

Psychiatry Woven Through Palliative Care

Elizabeth Hale, MD, is a clinical assistant professor of psychiatry at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine. Dr. Hale is part of the inpatient palliative care psychiatry consult service two days a week at UPMC Presbyterian. She also works in the outpatient setting at the Center for Counseling and Cancer Support at UPMC Hillman Cancer Center.

On the inpatient side, Dr. Hale works with consultation-liaison psychiatry fellows and psychiatry residents. The palliative care psychiatry service is consulted for many clinical presentations. This includes patients who may be experiencing psychiatric symptoms that occur in the medical setting, including:

- Anxiety.
- Delirium.
- Dementia.
- Depression.
- Trauma or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Dr. Hale notes that it is a unique role to be part of a multidisciplinary medical team.

"The best part of my role is getting to support patients with the benefit of such a dynamic team," Dr. Hale says.

Dr. Hale is available to any team members for curbside discussions or debriefing around challenging clinical cases. She also facilitates a process group for the hospice and palliative medicine fellows.

Beyond structured education in the psychiatry residency and hospice and palliative medicine (HPM) fellowship, Dr. Hale's educational interests include psycho-oncology, physician well-being, trauma-informed care, and consultation-liaison psychiatry.

"Education is such an important aspect of palliative care," Dr. Hale says. "I value the opportunity to collaborate in reaching new audiences."

Hailey W. Bulls, PhD, is a licensed clinical psychologist and assistant professor of medicine. She is the associate director of the CHAllenges in Managing and Preventing Pain (CHAMPP) Clinical Research Center and core faculty member at the Palliative Research Center (PaRC).

Dr. Bulls received a National Cancer Institute K08 grant for her project titled "Development and Piloting of an Intervention to Reduce the Impact of Opioid Stigma in Cancer Pain." She is dedicated to advancing solutions in pain management. Her current research focuses on mitigating the impact of opioid stigma on cancer patients with pain, with an emphasis on health equity; early identification of cancer patients at risk for pain and neuropathy; and novel behavioral interventions to better manage pain.

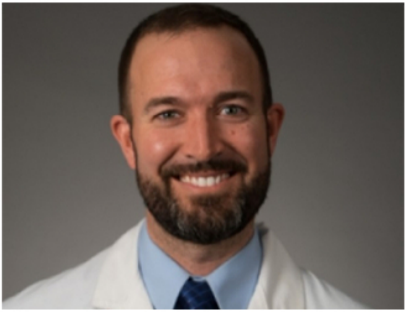
Recognized for her exceptional contributions, Dr. Bulls received an honorable mention for the National Institute of Health HEAL Director's Trailblazer Award. She also was selected for the Society of Behavioral Medicine's Monica Baskin Diversity Institute for Emerging Leaders in 2023. She presented "To Prescribe or Not to Prescribe: That is the Question" at the Senior Vice Chancellor's Research Seminar in February 2024.

Stay updated on her groundbreaking research. Follow @hwbulls on Twitter/X and check out her bibliography.

Awards and Recognitions

ACES Award

Donna Durant, CRNP, palliative care, UPMC Presbyterian, received the **UPMC Award for Commitment and Excellence in Service (ACES) for 2023.** ACES recipients are recognized for embodying UPMC's core values, exhibiting excellence in and dedication to their work, and going above and beyond to serve our patients and communities.



Association of American Physicians

Douglas B. White, MD, professor, critical care medicine, medicine, and clinical translational science, was elected to the Association of American Physicians (AAP).

Daisy Award

Colleen Hutzel, LSW, and **Cathy Calkins, CRNP**, palliative care, UPMC Presbyterian, received the Daisy Team Award. The award recognizes nurses for their part in the excellent care and compassion shown toward patients and families. Colleen is honored to have been nominated as a social worker alongside Cathy.

Multiple Accolades for Palliative Care Pharmacist

Maria Felton Lowry, PharmD, palliative care clinical pharmacy specialist, UPMC, and assistant professor, pharmacy and therapeutics, University of Pittsburgh School of Pharmacy, has received the:

- 2024 Richard L. Simmons, MD, Speak Up for Patient Safety Award in recognition of her passion for patient safety while providing care.
- 2024 Tara E. Cook Memorial Teaching Award for her commitment to excellence in medical education.
- Scott R. Drab University of Pittsburgh School of

Pharmacy Preceptor of the Year award, as selected by the Class of 2024, for her dedication to the students, the university, and the profession.

Training and Education

Palliative Fellows Graduation

Congratulations to our recently graduated palliative care fellows: **Vasili Bushunow, MD, Rebecca Ellis, MD, Taylor Huntington, MD, Amit Pujari, MD**, and **Courtney Wagner, MD**.

Program director **Ethan Silverman, MD**, described the graduates as "a truly special class of fellows. What emerged from their diverse backgrounds and experiences was a spirit of curiosity and an interest in learning to not only grow as individuals, but to have the entire Section grow. They are now a fantastic representation of alumni!"

Teach Like a Champion (TLAC)

Palliative Care medical education faculty are working with the Teach Like a Champion (TLAC) organization to integrate equity-focused and evidence-based teaching strategies in palliative care education. Active learning strategies increase overall learner performance and narrow achievement gaps in STEM fields.

"The goal is an engaged classroom," says **Rene Claxton, MD**, director, palliative care undergraduate and graduate medical education, University of Pittsburgh Department of Medicine. "Since its introduction to palliative care teaching here at Pitt, our classrooms are much more lively, more energetic, and students are participating to a higher degree."

TLAC representatives visited the university in December 2023 to observe, record, and provide feedback on faculty teaching. During this visit, TLAC faculty videorecorded PalliTalk. The national TLAC medical educator course is now using video clips of the PalliTalk teaching of **Ethan Silverman, MD**, and **Kendall Downer, MD**, as exemplar videos.

Diversity and Inclusion

CARE-Gleitsman Scholars Program

Congratulations to our 2024 CARE-Gleitsman scholars: **Delma Mbulaiteye** (Howard), **Akiera Palm** (Morehouse), **Stephania Luna** (Charles Drew), and **Gabriella Forchion** (Ponce Health Sciences). They are engaging in supportive oncology and palliative care research this summer with their mentors at UPMC Hillman Cancer Center and the University of Pittsburgh. Learn more about these **exceptional scholars and the program**.

Interprofessional in Nursing

PaRC core faculty member **Jennifer Seaman, PhD**, is currently leading the McElhattan Foundation-funded program, "Equipping Frontline Providers to Deliver High-Quality End-of-Life Care: Interprofessional Certificate and Continuing Education Program for End-of-Life Care and Communication."

This program is designed to build primary palliative care capacity among clinician leaders and frontline health care workers across the tristate region (Pennsylvania, Ohio, West Virginia) and nationally.

The 12-credit program offers an interprofessional post-baccalaureate certificate in end-of-life care and communication. It includes courses for:

- Allied health professionals, such as physical therapists, occupational therapists, and social workers.
- Bedside nurses.
- Nonlicensed personnel, such as patient care technicians.
- Nurse leaders.

The goal is to facilitate the development of expert primary palliative care skills. Additionally, continuing professional development modules will advance the knowledge and skills of nurses and other frontline health care personnel, such as patient care technicians, in various settings where end-of-life care is delivered, including:

- Assisted living facilities.
- Hospitals.
- Skilled nursing facilities.

PittEducation

Ubuntu Pittsburgh Project

This spring, **Justin Yu, MD**, and **Margaret Rosenzweig, PhD**, launched the Ubuntu Pittsburgh Project with support from The Pittsburgh Foundation. This initiative seeks to train and empower nonordained leaders within the Black faith community to provide enhanced support and advocacy to Black women living with metastatic breast cancer in Pittsburgh.

Welcome New Team Members

- **Emma Kofmehl, MD**, assistant professor of medicine (September 2024).
- **Hannah Kwiecinski**, PaRC/REMI project coordinator.

Select Publications

- **Connor McCormick, Mamta Bhatnagar, Robert M. Arnold, et al, *Journal of Palliative Medicine*, Description and Outcomes of a Palliative Care Pharmacist-Led Transitions of Care Program.**
- **Hailey W. Bulls, Megan Hamm, Julia Wasilewski, et al,**

Cancer, To Prescribe or Not to Prescribe: That Is the Question.

- Kelly W. Harris, Kelsey Schweiberger, Ann Kavanaugh-McHugh, et al, *PEC Innovation*, An Observational Study of Dialogue about Uncertainty in Clinician-Family Counseling Conversations Following Prenatal Diagnosis of Complex Congenital Heart Disease.
- Sarah G. Bell, Andrew D. Althouse, Shane C. Belin, et al, *Journal of Palliative Medicine*, Associations of Health Care Utilization and Therapeutic Alliance in Patients with Advanced Cancer.
- Jennifer B. Seaman, Teresa H. Thomas, Risa L. Wong, et al, *American Journal of Hospice & Palliative Medicine*, Implementing a Palliative Care Junior Faculty Visiting Professor Program: Pearls and Pitfalls.

Media

- **Jessica Merlin, MD**, was featured on the *GeriPal* podcast episode " **Substance Use Disorder in Aging and Serious Illness**." Dr. Merlin was also interviewed on KDKA Radio's *The Rick Dayton Show on* " **The Relationship Between Cancer Recovery and Addiction**."
- **Teresa Hagan Thomas, PhD**, associate director, mentorship and nursing research, Palliative Research Center, and **Yvette Dudley Morissey**, research coordinator, were featured on ***KDKA+'s Intersections***. They discussed patient self-advocacy and how people can develop skills to improve their care.

PaRC Annual Report

2024
ANNUAL
REPORT

Explore highlights from 2024 in PaRC's **Annual Report**.

Supporting Palliative Care

Through education, research, community partners, and clinical programs, we are discovering and implementing innovative ways to enhance quality of life for all patients and families living with serious illness.

Your gift matters.

Learn more

© 2024 UPMC

| 200 Lothrop

Street, Pittsb

urgh, PA 15213