UPMC
LIFE CHANGING MEDICINE

Palliative Research CENTER PaRC

July 2023

Palliative Care News

Message from Jane Schell, MD

Associate Professor of Medicine
Section Chief of Palliative Care and Medical Ethics

As another academic year gets underway, new beginnings reinvigorate our purpose. As the new section chief of Palliative Care, I can think of no better way to kick off the new year than with the launch of this newsletter, wherein we highlight the amazing work taking place throughout the **Section**, the **Palliative Research Center (PaRC)**, and the **community**.

Take a few moments to meet our incredible team and appreciate the work they do to advance clinical care, research, and education in palliative care. I am so proud to be part of this group!

With gratitude,

Jane O. Schell

Events

AAHPM March 2023

So great to connect with friends and colleagues!

View a full list of 2023 AAHPM presentations and posters from University of Pittsburgh, UPMC, and PaRC colleagues.

University of Pittsburgh Research Day April 2023

Congratulations to Richelle DeBlasio, BS, Mayumi Robinson, BA, MA, Georgeann Booth, BS, and Gina Piscitello, MD, MS for their participation in the **Department of Medicine's Research Day** on April 25, 2023.

View a full list of their presentations.

Honoring Dr. Arnold

Robert M. Arnold, MD, has stepped down from his role as section chief of Palliative Care and Medical Ethics. We were honored to celebrate with him at a recent gathering. His impact on the growth of palliative care at UPMC and the University of Pittsburgh, and on all of us, is beyond measure.

Program Highlights

Goals of Care

A new Goals of Care process is being launched at several UPMC sites in 2023 following its initial rollout at UPMC Presbyterian Shadyside in 2022. The intent of the initiative is to promptly identify patients at the highest risk of mortality with the use of a machine learning algorithm known as the **serious illness risk indicator (SIRI) score**. Additionally, the process assists clinicians in initiating timely goals of care discussions and documenting those discussions in a consistent place.

This includes an automated alert in the EMR (Cerner) to the ordering provider for patients with a high or intermediate risk of mortality who have not had a goals of care discussion in the first 48 hours of admission as well as a targeted automatic palliative care consult for high-risk patients.

The process launched to UPMC Magee-Womens Hospital and UPMC Mercy in March 2023. It will expand to UPMC Passavant, East, McKeesport, and St. Margaret during summer 2023 and to UPMC Hamot, Northwest, Horizon, and Jameson in the fall of 2023.

TelePalli Program Eases Access to Palliative Care in Rural Communities

An inpatient telemedicine palliative program, known as TelePalli, has been launched at five of UPMC's rural hospitals that did not otherwise have access to this specialty: UPMC Northwest, UPMC Jameson, UPMC Horizon – Shenango, UPMC Horizon - Greenville, and UPMC Somerset.

"The increased use of telehealth addresses the lack of access to specialty palliative care for those who live far from urban academic centers," says Karl Bezak, MD, program medical director. "This program has helped bridge this gap for some of our most critically and seriously ill patients while keeping them near their home and loved ones."

The palliative care telemedicine team is also working to educate staff and patients on the benefits of palliative involvement and how this specialty can help along the trajectory of chronic and life limiting illnesses. Sara Hayes, PA-C, PSI, is newer to the effort but sees it taking hold in a meaningful fashion. "Education has been invaluable to promoting the program but also to building awareness of everything palliative care has to offer," says Sara.

Staff Spotlight

Colleen Hutzel, LSW

Palliative Social Work
PSI, UPMC Presbyterian Shadyside

Colleen successfully secured a $10,000 grant from the **Ladies Hospital Aid Society (LHAS)** on behalf of the hospital for a "Miracle Box," which provides for items to enhance the patient and family experience.

"Receiving this grant creates access to things that better align with the needs of our patients and families," says Colleen. "With patients from all over the country and the world, it is vital to meet them where they are. This may mean education, communication, or increased bereavement tools and resources. We even have a bit of money for phone chargers."

The grant also provides for legacy projects. Colleen describes helping a patient create a cookbook to hand down recipes to a grandchild. "It's really meaningful and fun to incorporate this into bedside care," says Colleen.

Training and Education

Fellowship Program

A Note from Ethan Silverman, MD
Program Director

I'm excited to share missives from the **fellowship**! For those who didn't know, there have been several changes in the fellowship leadership recently. Alyssa Bernens is our program coordinator extraordinaire. Eva Reitschuler Cross, MD is now our associate program director, and I am our program director. The pediatric leadership remains in the amazing hands of Scott Maurer, MD and Amanda Brown, MD.

We are one of a handful programs with a dedicated pediatric track. Academic year 2023-24 will be our third year of the dedicated peds track, and we have recruited stellar candidates. New for 2023-24, our inaugural combined Hematology/Oncology and Palliative Care fellow starts. We are one of four pilot programs embarking on this exciting and needed combined fellowship!

Keep in touch! We would love to hear from previous graduates, as they are the best testament of our fellowship!

Diversity and Inclusion

Community Church Outreach

Justin Yu, MD, MS, assistant director, Community Outreach and Collaboration, PaRC, collaborated with leaders from Destiny of Faith Church in successfully developing and piloting a hospice-centered educational program tailored for Black lay ministers. The curriculum aimed to enhance lay ministers' ability to support their fellow congregants dealing with serious illness and focused on topics such as advanced care and estate planning, bereavement support, and advanced skills in emotional and spiritual support.

Dr. Yu presented this work, "Using Human-Centered Design to Collaboratively Develop a Hospice-Focused Educational Intervention for Black Lay Ministers" at this year's **AAHPM Annual Assembly of Hospice and Palliative Care**.

Wellness

A $6000 grant from the Physician Thrive Wellbeing program, secured by Lisa Podgurski, MD, and Linda King, MD, is funding several initiatives promoting clinician wellbeing. Programs include a writing workshop series facilitated by a writer and psychiatrist through the Things They Carry Project, training and follow-up sessions on acceptance and commitment therapy and art therapy sessions.

In a follow-up survey, participants expressed feeling "supported and heard by colleagues" and "more connected to the work in a way that recharged me."

As Dr. Podgurski expressed it, "We have the most meaningful impact on the patients and learners we aim to serve when we bring our whole selves to the effort. Attending to our own wellbeing is not an optional part of our work."

Welcome

Join us in welcoming new team members.

Charles Mupamombe, MD
Outpatient Palliative Care, UPMC Hillman Cancer Center

Stacy Niditch, CRNP
Outpatient Palliative Care, UPMC Hillman Cancer Center

Maria Garcia, MSW
UPMC Passavant and UPMC Presbyterian

PaRC
(Palliative Research Center)

Message from Yael Schenker, MD, MAS, FAAHPM

Professor of Medicine with Tenure
Director, Palliative Research Center (PaRC)
Associate Director, Research Education, Training and Career Development, UPMC Hillman Cancer Center

We are in the midst of another busy, exciting year at the **Palliative Research Center (PaRC)**. In partnership with our collaborators in the Section, across the University of Pittsburgh, and nationally, we continue to generate impactful research that benefits our community and drives change in serious illness care. We remain committed to our **impact areas**, and we are continually seeking new ways to engage more diverse students and mentees in palliative care research.

Want to learn more about what's happening at PaRC? Check out our website, **follow us on Twitter**, and join in the conversation!

Warmly,

Mentee Spotlight

Chelsea Green, MS
Morehouse School of Medicine
2022 Gleitsman Scholar

Gleitsman scholar Chelsea Green, MS, presented at the 2023 AAHPM Annual Assembly of Hospice and Palliative Care on March 24, 2023, along with colleagues from PaRC and the Section of Palliative Care and Medical Ethics. Her presentation, "Patient-Provider Communication and Cancer-Related Financial Hardship in the Context of Serious Illness," was informed by her research with PaRC mentor Sarah Belcher, PhD, RN, OCN.

Green's experience as a Gleitsman scholar inspired her to pursue a career in palliative care. In an interview following her experience with the program, she said "I fell in love with the field. I look forward to continuing to resolve gaps within healthcare and improving the quality of patient care."

Center Highlights

PaRC is pleased to announce the **2023 recipients of the Gleitsman Student Diversity in Palliative Care Research Award**: Adaugo Okpareke, BS, Morehouse School of Medicine; Andrea Nicole Navarro Zambrana, MS, BS, Ponce Health Sciences University; Sarah Khan, MS, BS, A.T. Still University – School of Osteopathic Medicine; and Ashley Jones, BS, Saint Louis University School of Medicine.

Dr. Schenker has accepted new positions as **associate director for Research Education, Training, and Career Development at UPMC Hillman Cancer Center** and associate chief of Research for the Section of Palliative Care and Medical Ethics.

Check out Robert M. Arnold, MD, on **GeriPal** where he recommends books on becoming a better mentor.

Select Publications

"An Educational Intervention to Enhance Palliative Care Training at HBCUs" was published in the Journal of Pain and Symptom Management by first author 2021 Gleitsman program scholar K. Ashley Lyttle, Dr. Schenker, Dr. Arnold and colleagues.

A project piloted by Margaret Rosenzwieg, PhD, CRNP-C, AOCNP, FAAN, addressing healthcare disparities among African American women experiencing breast cancer was featured in the 2023 winter edition of **PITTMED**.

A **NEJM Catalyst article** by Dr. Schell, Dr. Arnold and colleagues examines the effect of machine-learning algorithms on palliative care practices.

A **JAMA Oncology article** by PaRC core faculty members Jessica Merlin, MD, PhD; Hailey Bulls, PhD; Robert Arnold, MD, and colleagues was featured as a top influential paper during the 2023 AAHPM Annual Assembly of Hospice and Palliative Care State of the Science.

View more PaRC research.

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.

Make a difference today

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