The Brookdale Department Rapidly Expands Care in COVID-19 Response

At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in New York City this spring, there was little information known about the novel coronavirus, except that older adults were more likely to have severe adverse outcomes. The Brookdale Department of Geriatrics and Palliative Medicine at Mount Sinai immediately expanded all service lines, tapping into new opportunities and innovations, to ensure that all older adults had access to the care they needed.

The two Martha Stewart Centers for Living as well as the ambulatory practice at Mount Sinai Morningside (formerly Mount Sinai St. Luke’s) transitioned the majority of patient appointments to telephonic services and expanded access to Mount Sinai at Home. If patients had urgent needs that required in-person visits, extensive measures were taken to protect them from COVID-19. One such measure was the temporary relocation of the Martha Stewart Center for Living Uptown to a less trafficked, more private clinical space.

Fellows and faculty members were redeployed throughout the Mount Sinai Health System’s Emergency Departments, Critical Care Units, and satellite care centers such as the medical tents in Central Park, in order to maximize the number of older adults cared for and reduce the clinical burdens in those settings. With geriatricians embedded in urgent care settings, colleagues were able to focus exclusively on managing the respiratory failure caused by COVID-19. With this, innumerable lives were saved.

The Brookdale Department rapidly expanded Mount Sinai at Home, allowing for both COVID and non-COVID patients to be cared for in the setting where they were most comfortable. Previously a research project, Palliative Care at Home was launched and scaled to meet the new demand of homebound persons. In addition, Continuation of Hospitalization at Home (CHaH) was created to allow patients to move from the hospital to home while continuing to receive hospital-level care. During the surge of COVID patients, CHaH allowed more patients to be seen in settings that were more appropriate to both their health and wellbeing.

“Every day over the past few months, I have watched our teams throughout the health system design new solutions to situations and problems that we could never have envisioned. Programs that normally would have taken months to plan and create were rolled out in days. This creativity, innovation, and commitment allowed us to care for the seemingly overwhelming numbers of patients and families who needed us,” said Dr. R. Sean Morrison, Ellen and Howard C. Katz Chair of the Brookdale Department.
Since opening the first Martha Stewart Center for Living in 2008, I have been so proud to support the Brookdale Department of Geriatrics and Palliative Medicine at Mount Sinai. Mount Sinai has demonstrated its leadership throughout the pandemic by providing a model of excellence in medical care, especially for older adults and their loved ones, to the nation.

The impact that the Brookdale Department has had on curbing the COVID-19 pandemic in New York City cannot be overstated. In every way, the Department rose to the challenges presented and provided lifesaving, dignified, and compassionate care to patients, their families, and to their colleagues. In May, I had the unique opportunity to video conference with some of the frontline workers. I was able to offer my profound gratitude for their selflessness and sacrifices, and hear their stories firsthand. It is reassuring to know individuals such as these doctors and nurses are caring for us and our communities. I have never been prouder to stand with the Brookdale Department of Geriatrics and Palliative Medicine.

The pandemic took an unprecedented toll on our hospitals, and now, it is time for us all to support the workers who have always been essential. I would like you to join me in supporting the Brookdale Department philanthropically so that we can ensure the continuation of this high-quality care for older adults and their loved ones. As we move forward, older adults will continue to be at high-risk for COVID-19 until the virus is eradicated. Our patients disproportionally experience adverse outcomes from COVID-19 and COVID-19 can cause new serious illness. With this, the costs associated with increased staffing, essential equipment, and more will continue to grow. If you are interested in donating to our work, please visit: http://giving.mountsinai.org/geriatrics.

I wish you the very best health, wellness, and safety as we enter our ‘new normal’.

Sincerely,

Martha

Expansion of Geriatric Care to the Upper West Side Earns Prestigious Acclaim

After expanding the Martha Stewart Center for Living to Union Square, the Brookdale Department of Geriatrics and Palliative Medicine set its sights on the West Side of Manhattan. At Mount Sinai Morningside (formerly Mount Sinai St. Luke’s), services for all older adults in the community were expanded so successfully last summer that they earned prestigious designations. Reflecting the caliber of service provided, the hospital was honored as an Age-Friendly Health System Committed to Care Excellence by the Institute for Healthcare Improvement. It also received acclaim from the American College of Emergency Physicians.

Expansion at Mount Sinai Morningside included a new outpatient clinic and a dedicated Geriatrics Emergency Department. The outpatient clinic, modeled after the Martha Stewart Centers, offers care from a multidisciplinary team of experts in geriatrics and palliative medicine. The goal is to ensure that every patient receives the services and support needed to live with health and dignity.

Mount Sinai Morningside’s Geriatric Emergency Department earned accreditation by the American College of Emergency Physicians. This accreditation is awarded to hospitals whose older adult patients receive well-coordinated quality care at the appropriate level at every Emergency Room encounter.

“As a Health System, we have a unique opportunity to ensure that every older adult in New York City has access to the same high-quality care. As we expand our practices, we expand the services that we are able to provide, and more and more persons have the care that they need,” said Dr. Audrey K. Chun, Vice Chair of Ambulatory Services for the Brookdale Department.

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NEW LEADERSHIP BODES WELL DURING PANDEMIC

Introducing Tremayne Cunningham, MS
Vice-Chair of Administration and Finance

Ms. Tremayne Cunningham, a more than 20-year veteran of the Mount Sinai Health System, joined the Brookdale Department of Geriatrics and Palliative Medicine last summer to lead its administrative and financial operations. Within her first year in the role, she faced an unimaginable challenge: leading the Department, whose patients are at highest risk, through a global pandemic.

In partnership with Chair Dr. R. Sean Morrison, Ms. Cunningham leveraged her considerable expertise and demonstrated extraordinary leadership for the Department as the clinical and administrative teams responded to rapidly shifting needs and great uncertainty.

“When we recruited Tremayne last year, we expected that she would make considerable improvements to our program. What we did not expect was a crisis of COVID’s magnitude and how proficiently she led our administrative teams with expertise and grace. Tremayne’s partnership will undoubtedly ensure that our department continues to advance healthcare for all older adults, persons with serious illness, and their loved ones,” said Dr. Morrison, Ellen and Howard C. Katz Chair of the Brookdale Department of Geriatrics and Palliative Medicine.

Before she joined the Brookdale Department, Ms. Cunningham served as Director of Operations in both the Department of Pediatrics and the Department of Neurology. She is well versed in the needs of vulnerable patients and their caregivers. In her previous roles, Ms. Cunningham was successful in improving patient access and satisfaction, clinical workflow, and strategic planning.

Kudos: Special Faculty Honors and Achievements

- Christine Chang, MD, Nami Sarai Haeri, MD, Kelly Cummings, MD, and Helen Fernandez, MD – awarded American Geriatrics Society’s Best Abstract for “A Model Quality Improvement Curriculum for Geriatric and Palliative Care Fellows.”

- Kavita Dharmarajan, MD, MSc – received the Jeffrey H. Silverstein Memorial Award for Emerging Investigators in the Surgical and Related Medical Specialties in 2020 from the American Geriatrics Society.

- Fay Kahan, LCSW – received the 2020 Dr. Susan Blumenfeld Award for Clinical Excellence in Social Work from the Mount Sinai Auxiliary Board.

- Helen Fernandez, MD – selected by the American Medical Association and the American Geriatrics Society to serve on the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education Review Committee for Internal Medicine.

- Ravi Ramaswamy, MD – appointed to the American Geriatrics Society and Advancing Geriatrics Academic Programs Education Committee.

- Sharon See, PharmD, BCPs, FCCP – selected as a 2020 Gerontological Society of America Fellow.

- The following physicians were named among Castle Connolly’s Top Doctors in Geriatrics: Shahla Baharlou, Eileen H. Callahan, Emily J. Chai, Christine Chang, Audrey K. Chun, Linda V. DeCherrie, Helen M. Fernandez, Howard M. Fillit, Joyce F. Fogel, Fred Ko, R. Sean Morrison, and Monte H. Peterson.
Dr. Helen Fernandez is a second-generation physician and the Co-Director of the Brookdale Department’s Fellowship Program. In addition to caring for her patients and their families, she is also responsible for the education of future geriatricians. During the COVID-19 pandemic, she took to social media to explain how her role as caregiver expanded: “Throughout this month I have been lucky to work with people who are on a mission to improve the care for all. We are health workers. We can’t stay home. We have to go to work. We leave our families, risk our health every day, check remotely to see if our kids are doing homework, provide care for our loved ones, and hold the suffering of all. If you really think about it, it is an impossible job, but we do it!”

Along with 45 other members of the department, Dr. Fernandez contracted COVID-19 and recovered without severe complications. As soon as she could, she went back to work. “As a primary care geriatrician, you are part of a critical aspect of people’s lives. My patients trust and need me. I won’t leave them to face this alone,” she stated.

Dr. Fernandez is among a team of dedicated, selfless clinicians who, she says, choose to lead with empathy, use urgency as a friend, communicate, and celebrate all wins.