

## Mount Sinai Launches Steven S. Elbaum Family Center for Caregiving

Caregivers—often family members and friends—are a vital but invisible part of health care. There are more than 53 million caregivers in the United States today, and that number is growing. To better meet the needs of older adults, those with serious illness, and their loved ones, the Brookdale Department of Geriatrics and Palliative Medicine has established the Steven S. Elbaum Family Center for Caregiving, a groundbreaking initiative designed to improve how the U.S. health care system recognizes and supports caregivers.

The Center was made possible through a visionary founding gift from Trudy Elbaum Gottesman and Robert W. Gottesman, in memory of Trudy's brother, Steven S. Elbaum, who passed away at age 76. "Our family's experience with caregiving during Steve's illness revealed the profound stress and challenges caregivers face daily. This Center will honor his legacy by providing support and resources to caregivers nationwide," said Judy Elbaum, Mr. Elbaum's wife.

"Steve's extraordinary gift was his ability to embrace and nurture those around him. He was a true caregiver—someone who listened deeply, offered wise counsel, and always considered the well-being of others," said Trudy Elbaum Gottesman.

The Steven S. Elbaum Family Center for Caregiving will transform caregiver support through the following key initiatives, pioneering scalable support models for nationwide implementation, pursuing innovative caregiving research, training

the next generation of caregiving scientists, and advocating for policy reforms that recognize caregivers as essential health care partners. The Center's research will directly inform national guidelines and policy recommendations, fundamentally reshaping how the health care system supports caregivers. The Center will house a caregivers clinical practice, already established at Mount Sinai, to provide targeted psychosocial care to the parents, partners, children, siblings, and friends of patients receiving care at Mount Sinai.

Leading this innovative Center is **Allison J. Applebaum, PhD**, a nationally recognized



*Allison J. Applebaum, PhD*

expert in the emotional and psychological needs of caregivers. Dr. Applebaum joined the Brookdale Department in September 2024 from Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center. At Mount Sinai, Dr. Applebaum brings her expertise

to a much broader audience—supporting caregivers of patients with all illnesses and disabilities. "Caregivers are essential providers of physical, emotional, financial, and practical support to loved ones, but they remain an often-invisible force in American health care. It is time for academic medicine



to move beyond acknowledging the problem of caregiver burden to creating effective, scalable care models that can be implemented nationwide to support this under-recognized and under-supported workforce," said R. Sean Morrison, MD, the Ellen and Howard C. Katz Professor and Chair of the Brookdale Department.

"At Mount Sinai, Dr. Applebaum will bring innovative approaches to families in the caregiving trenches, while also establishing training programs for pre- and postdoctoral fellows in caregiving science across a wide range of disciplines," said Dr. Morrison. In addition, she will bridge partnerships with health care institutions, community organizations, and caregiver advocacy groups to extend the Center's impact beyond Mount Sinai, according to Dr. Morrison. And, within the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, the Center will join together with the Center to Advance Palliative Care (CAPC) to develop and disseminate caregiver support tools and models nationwide, leveraging decades of experience gleaned by the CAPC.

## Brookdale Department of Geriatrics and Palliative Medicine is at the Forefront of Innovative Medical Training

The Brookdale Department of Geriatrics and Palliative Medicine continues its role as a worldwide innovative leader in educational training for young doctors by creating two new training programs.



Helen M. Fernandez, MD

**The Integrated Medicine and Geriatrics Residency and Fellowship Program** enrolls newly graduated medical students into a four-year program that combines internal medicine residency and geriatrics fellowship. This training provides specialized geriatrics clinical rotations, individual mentorship, research opportunities, and additional training in important areas such as quality improvement and patient safety. Two of the residents enrolled in this program have been named chief residents, meaning that our geriatricians are taking on enhanced leadership roles in the hospital. The program, which was initially instituted in three hospitals nationwide in 2020, has grown to 14 sites, including The Mount Sinai Hospital, Mount Sinai Morningside, and Mount Sinai West.

The second innovative training program, which recruits new doctors to palliative medicine, is the **Mid-Career Palliative Care Fellowship**. This fellowship is for established, board certified doctors who want to receive additional training in palliative care but don't have the flexibility to leave their current practice for a year to complete their training. The program allows practicing doctors to continue in their current jobs while spending approximately 20 percent of their time training in palliative medicine.

"This has been an incredible pipeline to bring doctors into palliative care because when they return full time to their regular jobs, they become champions of palliative medicine and bring a palliative lens to every patient they meet," said Helen M. Fernandez, MD, Vice Chair of Education and Professor of Geriatrics in the



Brookdale Department. "This year, we have a vascular surgeon and a trauma surgeon in the program, which is super exciting, given the low representation of palliative care specialists in surgery. It is really important to have surgeons with palliative care skills."

Palliative care is specialized medical care for people living with a serious illness. This type of care is focused on providing relief from the symptoms and stress of the illness. The goal is to improve quality of life for both the patient and the family.

"We're constantly thinking about how to train more doctors to care for an increasingly older population," said Dr. Fernandez. "We believe that these fellowship programs, and others that we're currently developing, will help address this crucial gap."

# Mount Sinai's Commitment to Research **Addressing Health Disparities**

**Mount Sinai Health System's strong commitment to equitable access to health care is demonstrated by the Brookdale Department of Geriatrics and Palliative Medicine's hiring of two new clinician scientists who will be studying health care disparities and the resulting impact on quality of care and health outcomes.**

"We continue to see disparities in access to health care and health outcomes throughout the United States," said R. Sean Morrison, MD, the Ellen and Howard C. Katz Professor and Chair of the Brookdale Department. "The U.S. health care system needs to improve health outcomes for all Americans, which is why it's so important that we invest in research. And the two stellar researchers we're bringing on demonstrate Mount Sinai's commitment to equitable access to health care for all patients."



**Tessa Jones, PhD, LMSW**, currently a T32 Postdoctoral Fellow, has been appointed Assistant Professor in the Brookdale Department. She is a research scientist with a background in palliative care social work. Her research focuses on health disparities for seriously ill older adults with

a burgeoning focus on the impact of ownership models on health disparities.

In her current study, she is merging private equity industry data with Medicare home health care agency data to better understand and map out trends in ownership. This will set up future work that will examine how private equity acquisition of home health and hospice agencies may exacerbate disparities in access to services and patient outcomes.

"Medicare home health care and hospice are critical services to

seriously ill older adults. The majority of agencies are now for-profit with the most recent trend in for-profit ownership being private equity investment. We're trying to understand how the acquisition of home health and hospice agencies by private equity firms impacts patient care and patient outcomes," said Dr. Jones. "There is currently a lack of transparency and regulation in private equity ownership, and we hope this research will influence policy in ways that promote more equitable health outcomes."



**Alina Kung, MD**, is also a T32 Postdoctoral Fellow in the Disparities in Aging and Dementia Program at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, and she also serves as a palliative care attending in the Brookdale Department. Her research currently

focuses on two areas: disparities in hospital care by race, ethnicity, and insurance status and financial burdens caused by serious illness.

In a study published in January in the journal *Health Services Research*, Dr. Kung explores how patients are distributed unevenly between hospitals based on race and insurance. "Anyone should be able to walk into a hospital and receive the same treatment," said Dr. Kung. "But in reality, personal characteristics and the type of insurance a person has determine both hospital access and treatments received."

In another study, Dr. Kung examines how serious illness can impoverish older adults and how it affects their care. "Under our current system, patients must spend down their life savings in order to qualify for Medicaid, so they have access to things like long-term care, which they couldn't otherwise afford," she said. "So, it's really important to look more upstream at the impoverishment trajectory to find ways we can prevent this spiral."

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## **KUDOS: Special Faculty Awards and Achievements**

**Omar Amir, MD**, received the 2025 Choosing Wisely Champion Award and the 2025 Outstanding Junior Clinician Educator of the Year Award from the American Geriatrics Society.

**Robert M. Arnold, MD**, received the 2025 Gerald H. Holman Distinguished Service Award from the American Academy of Hospice and Palliative Medicine. VitalTalk, a program Dr. Arnold co-created, also received an AAHPM Presidential Citation.

**Anup Bharani, MD**, was appointed Chair of the Heart Failure Special Interest Group for the American Academy of Hospice and Palliative Medicine.

**The Martha Stewart Center for Living Uptown** has been recognized as an Age-Friendly Health System Committed to Care Excellence by the Institute for Healthcare Innovation.

**Ankita Mehta, MD**, was appointed Chair of the Intensive Care Unit Special Interest Group for the American Academy of Hospice and Palliative Medicine.

**Rebecca Rodin, MD, MSc**, received a 2025 Health in Aging Foundation New Investigator Award from the American Geriatrics Society.

**Nisha Rughwani, MD**, and **Erika Ortiz Sarmiento, MD**, received nominations for the Physician of the Year Award by the Mount Sinai Morningside Nursing Department.



# Supporting the Advancement of Palliative Care Through Philanthropy



**Rita Ginsky** is a loyal annual donor to the Lilian and Benjamin Hertzberg Palliative Care Institute, which sits within the Brookdale Department of Geriatrics and Palliative Medicine. Like many, she believes in supporting health care institutions and expresses her appreciation through annual donations. This year, Mrs. Ginsky

chose to update her plans and committed to a different kind of gift—a bequest through her will.

In partnership with the Development team, Mrs. Ginsky was able to leave a gift to Mount Sinai beyond her lifetime. She added a provision in her will to leave a bequest to Mount Sinai to support palliative care for people in need in honor of R. Sean Morrison, MD.

Dr. Morrison is the Ellen and Howard C. Katz Professor and Chair for the Brookdale Department and provided care to Mrs. Ginsky's late husband, Marvin. Dr. Morrison and his palliative care team of physicians, nurses, nurse practitioners, social workers, chaplains,

licensed massage therapists, yoga specialists, art therapists, and child life specialists work together to enhance the quality of life and provide an added layer of support for seriously ill patients and their caregivers.

The Ginskys first met Dr. Morrison in the Martha Stewart Center for Living Uptown. Mrs. Ginsky recalls that it was a very difficult time, but “Dr. Morrison's personal dedication and human touch made all the difference. With both Marvin and myself, he was always responsive and brought warmth and compassion to every encounter.”

Mrs. Ginsky's future gift will create an enduring legacy at Mount Sinai that will improve countless lives for years to come. Her generosity and thoughtfulness will strengthen Mount Sinai's ability to provide excellent care and help to train the next generation of geriatricians and palliative care specialists.

“Through Dr. Morrison's efforts, I realized the importance of palliative care. It alleviates a lot of needless suffering and aligns treatment options with our goals of care. I very much appreciate palliative care's mission in the health care field and communities,” Mrs. Ginsky said.



## Brookdale Department of Geriatrics and Palliative Medicine

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