Patients undergoing cancer treatment often deal with many issues, including side effects from therapy, stress, the logistics of getting to appointments, and a roller coaster of emotions. The supportive oncology team at the Brookdale Department of Geriatrics and Palliative Medicine at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai offers a range of palliative care services to ease the process.

Services are embedded at outpatient facilities at the Ruttenberg Treatment Center, the Dubin Breast Center of The Tisch Cancer Institute at Mount Sinai, The Blavatnik – Family Chelsea Medical Center, and Mount Sinai West.

The inter disciplinary palliative care team consists of doctors, nurse practitioners, and nurses who work closely with the oncology teams (cancer physicians and nurses, social workers, nutritionists, and chaplains) to provide care to patients of all ages and all stages of illness. They collaborate to optimize symptom and pain management, ease emotional and spiritual distress, offer support for medical decision-making, coordinate care, and help families cope with their loved one’s illness. Studies have shown that patients and their families who receive palliative care have a better quality of life, live longer, and are less likely to require hospitalization.

“We take a holistic approach to cancer care by addressing patients' physical, emotional, and social needs,” says Debora Afezolli, MD, Assistant Professor in the Brookdale Department and Medical Director for Ambulatory Palliative Care Services. “Our early involvement enables us to help manage stress and symptoms from the time of diagnosis through treatment as we get to know patients and their families. Our goal is to help improve their quality of life in any way possible.”

The initial visit with new patients is typically in person and lasts about an hour. Follow-up visits, usually every four weeks, can be in person, during their cancer treatment, or via telehealth, and typically take 30 minutes. Many patients prefer the convenience of telehealth visits. The team is also available for phone calls and visits between appointments, as needed. The response to supportive oncology services has been extremely positive from both patients and their families.

The supportive oncology practices across all sites provide care to hundreds of patients with cancer every year. The locations and services offered have grown since the program’s inception, and Dr. Afezolli expects that services will continue to expand. If patients believe they would benefit from supportive oncology services and they have not been referred by their oncologist, they should ask for a referral.

For more information, please contact 212-241-1446.
The Mount Sinai Health System believes that diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) are essential in creating a welcoming environment where all patients, staff, learners, and faculty feel safe, respected, and heard.

By embracing DEI principles, Mount Sinai aims for excellence and innovation in health care delivery, medical and health education, and research.

The Brookdale Department of Geriatrics and Palliative Medicine at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai has undertaken DEI initiatives to provide culturally responsive care for all patients and to enhance the representation of diverse groups in the medical field.

“Here in New York City, we see so many people from diverse backgrounds, all with different views about the care they want to receive,” says Allen D. Andrade, MBBS, Associate Professor in the Brookdale Department of Geriatrics and Palliative Medicine. Dr. Andrade is a member of Mount Sinai’s Faculty Diversity Council and the Brookdale Department’s DEI Council. “Because we want the best trained health care providers in the area, we provide regular educational events that are related to diversity, equity, and inclusion in order to educate our staff and trainees better so we can serve the public better.”

Meetings are held regularly for all members of the Department, giving participants the opportunity to raise issues of importance to them, whether it’s gun violence, health care accessibility, international conflict, or other issues that they feel the need to discuss and explore with their colleagues.

In addition, monthly events bring experts or stakeholders to discuss or share their experiences with attendees. For example, during Black History Month, Black doctors, nurses, and administrative staff shared their experiences with their colleagues as a way to begin a dialogue and encourage a new way of looking at the world around them.

These initiatives began in 2020, in the wake of George Floyd’s murder. Related protests demonstrated the need for greater sensitivity in dealing with colleagues and patients. Participation is not mandatory, but all are encouraged and welcomed to attend.

“DEI is a topic that can be misunderstood by the public because people are sometimes afraid of change or unaware of their unconscious biases,” says Dr. Andrade. “Our Department is committed to a diverse workforce and serving our diverse patients. We want to provide the best care to patients who are inherently vulnerable by promoting DEI within the Department.”

**Brookdale Department DEI Council Members:**

- Tremayne Cunningham, MS
- Allen Andrade, MBBS
- Shaquana Boye
- Katherine Brown, MS
- Stephanie Chow, MD, MPH
- Noelle Marie Javier, MD
- Reena Karani, MD, MHPE
- Sasha Perez, MPH
- Martine Sanon, MD
Improving Palliative Care Quality Across the Mount Sinai Health System

The medical teams across the Mount Sinai Health System continually strive to provide patients with quality, compassionate health care adhering to the highest standards of medicine. As medicine has become more complex and interdisciplinary in nature, there has been an increased focus on using data to guide improvement of quality of care.

Laura P. Gelfman, MD, Professor in the Brookdale Department of Geriatrics and Palliative Medicine, also serves as the Vice Chair of Quality and Clinical Innovation. She oversees an initiative that collects and analyzes data from the electronic health records (EHRs) and insurance claims of patients who have received care delivered by teams across the Department (such as inpatient and outpatient palliative care or geriatrics consultations and geriatric primary care) in order to improve the quality of care.

She has developed clinical registries, or a collection of standardized, confidential information about a group of patients who share an experience. This may include information about patients' health, reasons for seeking care, treatments they received, and their clinical course over time. By analyzing these data of patients with similar health issues, clinicians can identify ways to improve patient care.

“We use health data to develop clinical trials to create and test models of palliative care delivery,” says Dr. Gelfman. “We use EHR information to paint a picture of our patients to determine if we are meeting their needs, and to inform our decisions as we try to ensure that we continue doing what we do well, while also identifying opportunities to expand our services and to improve upon them.”

Provider Spotlight: Laura P. Gelfman, MD

Vice Chair of Quality and Clinical Innovation

Laura Gelfman, MD, showed initiative and passion from her first year of medical school at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai when she approached R. Sean Morrison, MD, who now serves as the Ellen and Howard C. Katz Chair, to ask if she could do research with him that summer. Dr. Gelfman quickly established herself as a valued member of the research team and received a prestigious Doris Duke Clinical Research Fellowship to do research for a year before finishing medical school. She credits many of the top doctors in the Brookdale Department, including Dr. Morrison and Diane Meier, MD, Founder and former Director of the Lilian and Benjamin Hertzberg Palliative Care Institute at Mount Sinai, with taking her under their wing and giving her opportunities to shine as a researcher and, eventually, as a physician.

In addition to being a gifted researcher, Dr. Gelfman finds practicing medicine gives her special joy. “I really enjoy the detective work that is part of internal medicine and also taking care of people,” she says. “It goes beyond what we learn in textbooks ... it’s understanding what’s going on with people and seeing who the person in front of you really is.”

“Palliative medicine, in particular, is a field where I can still satisfy my intellectual curiosity of discovering what’s going on with a patient and how best to help them, while also bringing compassion to their bedside, which is equally important,” says Dr. Gelfman. “And it’s not just about the patient, it’s also about their family and caregivers.”
What Is Palliative Care?

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.

Palliative care is provided by a specially trained team of doctors, nurses, and other specialists who work together with a patient's other doctors to provide an extra layer of support. Palliative care is based on the needs of the patient, not on the patient's prognosis. It is appropriate at any age and at any stage in a serious illness, and it can be provided along with curative treatment.

For more information, please visit mountsinai.org/care/palliative-care or GetPalliativeCare.org.