

# Power in Unity

## Members of the Information Technology Department Establish a Wellness Practice

Mount Sinai Fit spoke with Information Technology (IT) employees Valerie Ruffin, Executive Assistant; Carol Fawcett, Manager, Change Management Practice; Lillian Mason, Executive Assistant; Ashwini Chouthai, Application Analyst II; Faye Walters, Executive Assistant; Deborah Ingram, IT Project Coordinator, eHealth; and Natalya Sholomyansky, IT Director, to learn how the team motivated each other toward developing a stronger wellness practices.

### How did you learn about the wellness services available to you?

**Lillian Mason:** The Director of Mount Sinai Fit presented the free wellness services available to all of the IT executive assistants during a departmental meeting. I knew it was my time to get started. I was steadily gaining weight each year. I had every intention of losing weight, but I could not get motivated. Once I listened to the wellness service offerings—which included personal nutrition counseling and the digital diabetes prevention program, Blue Mesa Health—I knew I had the resources to get started. I immediately signed up for an appointment with Maria Elena Rodriguez, RD CDE, personal nutritionist for Mount Sinai Health System employees and faculty.

**Ashwini Chouthai:** I saw Lillian bringing healthy food for lunch and snacks. I asked her about it and she explained that she joined Transform with Blue Mesa Health and encouraged me to join. We have become Transform buddies.



Ricardo Somarriba, Ramesh Katta, Natalya Sholomyansky, Ashwini Chouthai, Tiffany Dawson, Rajarjan Ganesan, Lillian Mason, Darryl Hollar, and Jill Carroll from the IT Department

### Many of the IT team members walk during lunch time. How did this get started?

**Valerie Ruffin:** I participated in several wellness offerings including the personal nutrition counseling program, Livongo Health (a cloud-connected glucometer program), and the Mindfulness Meditation Program. I became very passionate about wellness. I was always talking with my colleagues about the programs I participate in. As I created a healthy eating plan, my average blood sugar dropped. I began increasing my activity level by walking five to six miles a day. It was a natural move to create a walking group with my colleagues and share our passion for healthy living.

**Ashwini Chouthai:** I saw Valerie's walking group being advertised on Yammer. I have began climbing five to six flights of stairs at the 42nd Street Corporate Office with another Transform buddy. Additionally, I participate in group exercises with my Transform team, exchange healthy ideas on the Blue Mesa Transform App, and encourage my fellow participants to keep up the good work with their wellness practice. I am also part of the Reach Your Peak Wellness Challenge. Part of the Challenge asks that participants log 10,000 steps per day. This is motivating me to crush more than 10,000 steps daily. Since I began my wellness practice, I have lost 12 pounds. My physician has noticed the difference in my weight and lab values.

**Valerie Ruffin:** I am a team captain for the Reach Your Peak Wellness Challenge. We have a tight-knit group of walkers and have become friends through walking—in addition to being professional colleagues.

**Faye Walters:** My colleagues in IT motivated me. I have lost 10 pounds and I know that I could not have done this without the support from my team.

### I see several of you are wearing activity trackers. How did this come about?

**Deborah Ingram:** After attending a meeting about the wellness services, I joined Blue Mesa Health and began tracking my food intake and steps. I knew I needed to become accountable to myself if I was going to lose the weight that my physician prescribed. Also, it was amazing to see Lillian's transformation.

**Lillian Mason:** I am also a Blue Mesa Health participant and feel it is my job to inspire the team. If someone needs a little bit of motivation, I am there for them. We work out in 15-minute segments once a week. We do squats, wall push-ups, and climb stairs. There is power in unity. I believe that "team work makes the dream work."

**Carol Fawcett:** I got involved with the wellness program over a year ago. I joined Off

the Scale, a high impact lifestyle change program. It combines weekly in person sessions with Garmin activity trackers. Tracking helps improve your eating habits, exercise regimen, and overall lifestyle. Off the Scale was excellent, extremely motivating, and effective. When I see colleagues wearing the green Garmin tracker, it reminds me that we are all in this together. Physical well-being has a positive impact on our minds, energy, and mood. I am also a regular attendee of the Wednesday night yoga class as well as the Mindfulness Meditation class taught by Mickie Brown, RN and Archimedes Bibiano. Having the classes available at our 42nd Street Corporate Office makes it easy for me to participate. My self-care practice also includes listening to the two-minute guided meditation recordings provided by Mount Sinai Calm.

### In addition to inspiring your co-workers, have you been able to spread the word of wellness to your family members or friends?

**Lillian Mason:** I have a 33 year old son. His weight has fluctuated over the past 10 years. I lost 34 pounds over a 6 month period. So, I shared my wellness strategy with my son. This includes reducing starches and eating more vegetables. He is eating healthier, works out at the gym, and has lost more than sixty pounds. My husband also follows my eating plan. Now I have my family, both at home and at work, engaged in wellness.

### Any final messages you would like to share with other Mount Sinai employees or departments considering starting a wellness practice?

**Carol Fawcett:** Give it a try! Find something you enjoy and consider how to make time for it during the week. Even small changes can make a big difference. When the work day becomes stressful, I pause to take a few deep breaths and refocus.

*If you are interested in the wellness classes or weight-loss initiative detailed above, visit <http://www.mountsinai.org/about/ms-fit>.*



# Yoga Nidra

Engaging in yoga and meditation have been life-changing experiences for Marc Nelles, who teaches yoga for staff, students, and faculty at Mount Sinai West. Mr. Nelles is a certified yoga therapist by the International Association of Yoga Therapists (IAYT), as well as a yoga and meditation teacher and a Reiki Master/Teacher. He specializes in Yoga nidra, or yogic sleep, a relaxation technique that Mr. Nelles was taught in the tradition of the Bihar School of Yoga.

For more than ten years prior to becoming a yoga instructor, Mr. Nelles danced professionally. A back injury required that he give up his passion for dance. While working in an office, he was introduced to yoga. "Yoga is a practice that furthered my healing process, not only physically, but also mentally," he says. During a period of life transition, yoga helped Mr. Nelles attain the tools to cope with different stressors and a long-standing issue, insomnia. Possessing an active, analytical mind, he often found it difficult to decompress. Establishing a yoga and meditation practice helped him calm his mind and establish healthy sleep patterns.

The progression from yoga student to yoga teacher deepened his practice and inspired him to share his wisdom. While teaching asana yoga classes, Mr. Nelles offers more than guiding his students through sequences. "I take my yoga students at Mount Sinai West on a healing journey that is often personal," says Mr. Nelles. His experience at an office job gave new perspective on the needs of after-work yoga students. "Yes, they need movement, especially if they sit at work throughout the day. However, students also need to learn how to calm their mind and prepare for a good night's rest."

Restorative poses and modifications with props take over the latter part of class. "My favorite is Viparita Karani—a restorative inversion, often practiced with legs up against a wall or without a wall, simply with your pelvis on a block. The most rewarding fact is that you can easily do it at home."

In the last twenty minutes of the hour-long class, Mr. Nelles encourages students to exhale and surrender. He leads students through processing and letting go of daily stresses. "This journey needs to be guided," notes Mr. Nelles. "Too often we zone out and do not acknowledge the manifestations in the body that come to surface."

The class ends with elements of Yoga nidra. During this wind down, an increase of alpha and theta brain waves prompt such stillness that students occasionally doze off.

"People do fall asleep, and I frequently hear snoring. I do not mind. I actually take it as a compliment."

*To view when Marc Nelles' yoga class is held at Mount Sinai West, visit: <http://www.mountsinai.org/about/ms-fit/self-care>.*



[mountsinai.org/mswellness](http://mountsinai.org/mswellness)

WINTER 2018

# CALM & FIT

MOUNT SINAI HEALTH SYSTEM WELLNESS

## > A Message from



**JANE MAKSOOD, RN, MPA**  
Senior Vice President and Chief Human Resources Officer, Mount Sinai Health System

Dear Colleagues,

I am pleased to present the winter edition of Mount Sinai Calm and Fit. Falling temperatures and year-end pressures can easily unravel the strongest commitment to exercise, good nutrition, and meditation. After all, it is much easier to stay indoors, curl up on the couch, and contemplate the benefits of hibernation than to log your steps. While sleeping for weeks may work for bears, people need a plan that gets us off the couch. The perfect antidote to the over-commitment and stress many experience throughout the holiday season may be a wellness class or a consultation to develop a self-care plan.

The Mount Sinai wellness team would like to help you embrace the richness of the season and give the gift of "presence" to your patients, colleagues, friends, and family. In this issue, we highlight innovative programs available throughout the Mount Sinai Health System that support health and well-being. If you would like more information about any of our wellness offerings, please visit [www.mountsinai.org/mswellness](http://www.mountsinai.org/mswellness).

Best wishes for a happy and healthy 2018.

Jane



Marija Pranjic of the Louis Armstrong School of Music and Medicine, Gabriel Sara, MD, Kathleen Corres, RN, Letitia Alexander, RN

# Breakfast on 9A

## Music-Making as Supportive Self-Care at Mount Sinai West

Gabriel Sara, MD, Assistant Professor of Medicine (Medical Hematology and Oncology), Mount Sinai West, appreciates the value of self-care and the direct impact it can have on patients. As an oncologist, Dr. Sara is deeply aware of the emotional impact experienced by professionals who work with very fragile patients. He implemented "Breakfast on 9A," a monthly gathering that presents an opportunity for his team to come together and share personal stories. The early morning meeting brings together nurses, doctors, residents, social workers, chaplains, and milieu team members for a period of reflection and to process the emotional impact of facing trauma, death, fear, and the unknown in lock-step with their patients. Over coffee and bagels in a Mount Sinai West conference room with a spectacular view of the Hudson River, words flow, laughs ensue, and tears emerge. Dr. Sara, who plays a mean guitar, partners with Juan Robles, MA, MT-BC, a music therapist, to co-facilitate the session. The success of this unique meeting structure has spread throughout Mount Sinai West as has the personal

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“The breakfast is known as a *healing and bonding space* for all where creating music as a team promotes self-care, collaboration, mutual support, and collective healing.”

## › Breakfast on 9A continued from page 1 ›

investment of staff involved who are encouraged to bring colleagues. The breakfast is known as a healing and bonding space for all where creating music as a team promotes self-care, collaboration, mutual support, and collective healing.

As the Director of the Louis Armstrong Center for Music and Medicine, Joanne Loewy, DA, LCAT, MT-BC, relates, “One of the greatest privileges I have had as a music therapist is to work with Dr. Sara to build research, practice, and deliver care to support a place of ‘integration’ that serves patients, families, and staff. It is all connected.”

For more than two decades, music therapists from The Louis Armstrong Center for Music and Medicine have led groups that direct health care professionals and caregivers to engage in self-care throughout the

workday. After 9/11, the Department received a grant from the Recording Academy and the American Music Therapy Association to conduct research (Loewy & Frisch 2002, 2015) and to provide music therapy groups to staff in high stress work environments like the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit, Surgical Intensive Care Unit, and the Oncology Unit. Most recently, in collaboration with Mount Sinai Calm, The Louis Armstrong Center for Music and Medicine has expanded and enhanced the services they provide to staff members at various campuses throughout the Health System.

To learn more about The Louis Armstrong Center for Music and Medicine visit: <http://www.musicandmedicine.org>.

▪ **By Joanne Loewy, DA, LCAT, MT-BC**  
Director, The Louis Armstrong Center for Music and Medicine

## Mount Sinai Health System’s Wellness Program Launches Reach Your Peak Wellness Challenge

More than 2,000 Mount Sinai Health System faculty and employees grouped into 150 teams are participating in a 12-week wellness challenge, called Reach Your Peak—a term coined by Jonathan Acevedo, Program Coordinator, Talent Development and Learning, Mount Sinai Health System. Participants include faculty and employees from Health System campuses, the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, faculty practices, the Mount Sinai Health Network, and the corporate offices. Team captains for Reach Your Peak have been busy inspiring their team members to reach their personal best step-count each day.

**Steve Fecteau**, Senior Instructional Designer, Talent Development and Learning, is the Captain of Team TDL: Trainers in Training. “My team is having fun participating in Reach Your Peak. Each week we set individual and team goals and motivate each other to improve. Everyone is sharing examples and telling stories about how they have increased their steps from the previous week. We have even found some win-wins since participating in the wellness challenge. Some members of our team are actively looking for opportunities to attend meetings at other campuses instead of scheduling a conference call. This presents a wonderful opportunity to connect with staff across the Health System and increase our step counts.”

**Natalya Sholomyansky**, Director, E-Health, is the captain of Team Too Smart to Sit, Too Lazy to Run. She relates, “I email my team daily to provide motivation, remind them to walk, set achievable goals, and share tips on how to get their steps in. I always remind them to try to walk for five minutes each hour. When possible, I encourage them to find 15 – 30 minutes to walk each day. Recently, I suggested that team members get up during commercials while watching TV or take a five minute walk between episodes during Netflix binges. We have individual team challenges in which we try to reach a particular step count each week. I think this helps to bring some lightness and fun to the day. My role as a team captain is both rewarding and meaningful. I love to hear my teammates say that I help to motivate them. They also send me notes to let me know they took a walk. It is fulfilling to help others.”



Molly Orth, Alisa Melendez, Nana Yeboah, and Andrew Mullaney from Talent Development & Learning



## New Perspectives on Reading for Self-Care

Reading for pleasure may seem like an obvious solution to warding off the winter doldrums, but recent scientific research has proven that it may be more effective than we thought.

A recent study published in *Social Science & Medicine* examined reading patterns of 3,635 people over 50. Book readers were found to live almost two years longer than non-readers. Researchers at The New School also found that reading fiction can enhance empathy, helping readers to better understand the thoughts and feelings of others. Leisure reading can connect us with new communities, challenge our assumptions, allow time for quiet reflection, and get our creative juices flowing. No matter what the genre, reading for self-care is inexpensive, simple, and effective. Fiction can transport us to new worlds, while reading history books and autobiographies provide an opportunity for education. In all instances, a good book offers the appreciative reader accessibility to a world of immersion and delight.

If you have been out of the reading game for a while, it might be time to think about what format works best for you. As a librarian, I am frequently asked if I prefer

eBooks or print books. The answer surprises many, as it is both! As a resident of an outer borough, I love reading eBooks on my Kindle on my hour-long commute to the Levy Library at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai. The portability of e-readers is highly convenient, especially for commuting and traveling. At the same time, I still enjoy browsing print book collections and supporting public libraries and independent New York City book stores like The Strand.

Still having a hard time getting started? Check out [goodreads.com](http://goodreads.com), an online community that allows you to build lists and gives recommendations based on books you have enjoyed. Be sure to peruse the leisure book collection at the Levy Library, found in the Annenberg Building on the 11th floor. If you prefer eBooks, you are in luck as 98 percent of the Levy Library’s collection is online. Visit [library.mssm.edu](http://library.mssm.edu) to browse the collection. Additionally, the New York Public Library, Brooklyn Public Library, and Queens Public Library also have great eBook collections for leisure reading.

▪ **By Robin O’Hanlon**, Assistant Library Director, Outreach and Public Services, Levy Library, Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai

### References

*Bavishi, A., Slade, M. D., & Levy, B. R. (2016). A chapter a day: Association of book reading with longevity. Social Science & Medicine, 164, 44-48. Mar, R. A., Oatley, K., & Peterson, J. B. (2009). Exploring the link between reading fiction and empathy: Ruling out individual differences and examining outcomes. Communications, 34(4), 407-428.*

“My goal with every patient encounter is to *assess, treat, and educate* the patient about the injury diagnosis, treatment, and prevention.”



## Mount Sinai Health System’s Sports and Regenerative Medicine Physicians Aim to Treat and Prevent Injuries and Enhance Exercise Performance

Sports Medicine and Regenerative Medicine physicians at Mount Sinai Union Square and the Mount Sinai Doctors Faculty Practice on 5 East 98th Street offer employees and faculty members treatment for acute or over-use sports related injuries in a holistic manner. Interventions range from therapeutic procedures like regenerative medicine to injury prevention. Regenerative medicine is a subspecialty that aims to restore, replace, and rebuild human tissue using the body’s own healing properties.



**Gerardo E. Miranda-Comas, MD**, Assistant Professor, Associate Program Director of Sports Medicine Fellowship, Department of Rehabilitation Medicine, is a core faculty member of the Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Residency Program. Dr. Miranda-Comas is an active contributor to the Mount Sinai Fit Wellness Program and is available to treat employees and faculty members with sports related or over-use injuries. Dr. Miranda treats any sports or physical activity related musculoskeletal injury.

“My goal with every patient encounter is to assess, treat, and educate the patient about the injury diagnosis, treatment, and prevention. Physical activity is the best medicine. The exercise prescription should be individualized, taking into consideration several factors that include the type of activity, frequency,



Dr. Miranda-Comas recommends practicing wellness as a prescription to prevent injuries.

These suggestions include:

- **Engaging in 150 minutes per week** of moderate intensity aerobic exercise or 10,000 steps per day
- **Performing resistance training** two - three days per week that can include weights, bands, body weight
- **Participating in flexibility** and neuromuscular training such as yoga, Pilates, or tai chi, two - three days per week
- **Going from sitting to standing** multiple times throughout the day, limiting sitting at your desk to no more than 15 minutes at a time
- **Taking the stairs** rather than the elevator whenever possible
- **Planning healthy snacks** and meals in advance to avoid last minute unhealthy decisions
- **Practicing proper desk ergonomics** including sitting in proper posture while at your desk, this includes having a chair at the height for your knees to be 90 degrees and having the keyboard and monitor at proper heights

### To schedule an appointment:

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