The Palliative Care Consultation Service has added a third team to provide more extensive services to two Mount Sinai Medical Center inpatient units – the Solid Tumor Medical Oncology Service and the Surgical Intensive Care Unit (SICU). These units have patient populations with complex needs who can greatly benefit from palliative care. The addition of a physician, nurse practitioner, and social worker to the consultation service will enable team members to see more patients and provide consultation soon after their requests are admitted.

“They allow us to devote resources to patient populations who often have unmet needs for palliative care,” says Mr. Horton. ACHPN, FNP-BC, MPH, Director of the Palliative Care Consultation Service.

Cancer and SICU patients who meet established criteria will now automatically receive a palliative care consultation, rather than having physicians request one. “Physicians are so busy dealing with patients’ pressing medical needs that they often wait to request a palliative care consultation. When we see patients early in their hospitalization, we can provide better symptom management and assess the patient’s treatment goals in a timely manner,” says Mr. Horton.

The focus of palliative care for cancer patients is managing the many physical symptoms associated with treatment, as well as psychological issues. “Having cancer can be very challenging. All patients have a great need for emotional, spiritual, and practical support,” says Mr. Horton.

“They are facing a disease with complex treatment choices. Patients need open, sensitive communication about their disease status and goals and values concerning treatment.”

Last year, a quality improvement project in the Solid Tumor Medical Oncology Service showed that providing more palliative care consultations decreased readmission rates and inpatient mortality and increased admissions to hospice care. These positive results led Mount Sinai Medical Center to fund the additional palliative care team. “We showed the difference palliative care can make in improving patient outcomes,” says Mr. Horton. At the SICU, the priority is providing palliative care consultations to patients with complex medical and surgical conditions who are at a higher risk of not recovering. Many of these patients are unable to communicate and have not made their wishes known. “We coordinate communication among family members and ICU physicians and surgeons to enable them to make the best decision for the patient,” says Mr. Horton.

The team began providing services to the Solid Tumor Medical Oncology Service in August and the SICU in September. “It’s been extremely rewarding to work closely with our colleagues and focus on serving these patient populations,” says Mr. Horton.

The American Hospital Association honored the Hertzberg Palliative Care Institute this summer with its Circle of Life Award. The award recognized Mount Sinai’s innovative palliative care and end-of-life programs and was accepted by R. Sean Morrison, MD, Director of Hertzberg and the National Palliative Care Research Center, during a ceremony held in San Diego.

The Circle of Life Award, now in its fourth year, recognizes programs that have made great strides in palliative care. This year, eight programs were granted awards or citations of honor, each of which is raising the bar in palliative care and has affirmed a commitment to help every patient live as fully as possible with serious illness. Nominations for the Circle of Life Award are reviewed by an AHA committee which includes leaders from medicine, nursing, social work, and health administration.

Richard Umbdenstock, President and Chief Executive Officer of the AHA, said: “This year’s honorees exemplify the best in health care – providing compassionate care and helping patients and families facing complex health challenges.”

He added: “These innovative programs address critical needs so that patients can manage their health and live as fully as possible. They also reflect the needs of their communities as they provide the best care possible for those they serve.”

With respect to Mount Sinai’s palliative care program, the Circle of Life Award Committee said that it “was particularly impressed with the integration of palliative care and physician support throughout the medical center, interdisciplinary teams with strong nursing leadership, and emphases on primary palliative care.”

The committee also noted Mount Sinai’s “complementary therapies and bereavement support that are more expansive than those provided by most hospitals and academic medical centers,” as well as our research and educational initiatives. Dr. Morrison said: “Since its inception in 1997, the Hertzberg Palliative Care Institute has grown dramatically and now encompasses a broad array of clinical, educational, and research activities. I was privileged to accept this award on behalf of the dedicated specialists on our interdisciplinary consultation team and our inpatient Palliative Care Unit. These expert physicians, nurses, social workers, spiritual counselors, and licensed massage, art, and music therapists help patients and families establish goals, make decisions, manage symptoms, and maintain the best possible quality of life throughout the course of an illness and across the settings where they receive care.”

American Hospital Association Honors the Hertzberg Palliative Care Institute
When Amy Berman was diagnosed with Stage IV inflammatory breast cancer three years ago, she knew she had the worst possible prognosis. Inflamm-atory breast cancer has no cure. When diagnosed at this fourth and final stage, the cancer’s spread is well established, leading to five-year survival rates of only 20 per cent. Ms. Berman was clear from the outset that she wanted to focus the time she had left on quality of life and maintaining her function. She takes medication to slow the progression of her cancer and receives treatment for her symptoms, but she has rejected other treatment options of chemotherapy, radiation, and mastectomy.

“For me, the goal was to feel well for as long as possible, not to eke out more bad days,” says Ms. Berman. “I chose not to do the kinds of treatment that would defeat me now because they wouldn’t have a ben-efit in the end.”

Since her diagnosis, Ms. Berman, a registered nurse and serving officer program officer at the John A. Hartford Foundation, has become one of the country’s most inspira-tional advocates in Palliative Care. This April, she delivered our annual lecture on Palliative Care at Mount Sinai while attending medical school in Israel. She has trained for a joint fellowship in Geri-atrics and in Palliative Care. “Palliative Care teaches you so much about communicating with patients, which is important in caring for Geri-atric patients who face difficult medical decisions and end-of-life issues,” says Ms. Berman.

Ms. Berman’s choices are the exception, however. She explains that many patients don’t understand they may have options, often be-lieving that the only way to respond to dis-ease is to fight with every treatment at their disposal, even though their bodies are the battleground. Meanwhile, palliative care is often wrongly equated with end-of-life care, making patients reluctant to consider it.

“Palliative Care...”

In fact, palliative care has nothing to do with end of life other than the fact that it involves decisions about end-of-life care,” says Ms. Berman. “Palliative care can be appro-priate for cure, for chronic disease, and at the end of life. That’s something that con-sumers don’t know. They should understand that they can ask for it at any stage of their disease.”

WE ARE VERY PROUD to welcome back our new Director of the Palliative Care Unit, Olusegun (Segun) Apoeso, MD.

Dr. Segun Apoeso received his medical school education at the University of Ibadan Medical School and completed his residency in Ophthalmology at the Uni-versity of Ilorin Medical Hospital in Nigeria. He was ambitious enough to com-plete both a Residency Program in Internal Medi-cine at the University of Connecticut. From there, he joined our Geriatrics and Palliative Medicine Fellow-ship Program here at the Icahn School of Medicine. We tried to recruit him to stay here at Mount Sinai after his fellowship but he had prior commitments in Nigeria. He returned to Connecticut, where he served as a Director of Outpatient Services (2003–2013), Chairman of Infec-tion Control Committee (2003–2009), Hospice Med-ical Director (2009–2013) at Hebrew Health Care in West Hartford, and Assistant Pro-fessor Department of Med-icine, Division of Geriatrics at the University of Con-nnecticut (2003–2013). After 10 years of trying, we are fortunate enough to re-ruit Dr. Apoeso back to our team in Geriatrics and Palliative Medicine as the Di-rector of the Wiener Family Palliative Care Unit.

The idea of a ‘specialty’ unit, staffed and designed to promote wholistic, com-passionate, and urgent care for patients and families dealing with advanced stages of disease processes, has become nationally rele vant. It is great to be a part of the pioneering work at Mount Sinai and in the Department of Geriatrics and Palliative Medicine,” says Dr. Apoeso.

In Memoriam

On March 23, 2013, the Hertzberg Palliative Care Institute lost a beloved friend and member of our original advisory board, Walter (Tommy) Hess, Jr.

Tommy attended the University of Virginia and served in U.S. Army in World War II as Chief of Signal Intelligence Service (Mediterranean Theater) and attained the rank of Major. He spent virtually his entire career on Wall Street, as partner and then Vice Chairman at L.F. Rothschild, Unterberg, Towbin and later as a Managing Director at Bear Stearns. The love and commit-ment he had for his professional life led him to serve as a Board Member of the Securities Industry Association. In 1977, he received the Wall Street Award from the National Association of Christian Scientists and Jews. Tommy was passionate about giving back to the community. As an active board member, he gave much of his time to organizations including the Blythedale Chil-dren’s Hospital, Federation of Jewish Philanthropies, The Jewish Home and Hos-pital for the Aged, and our own Hertzberg Palliative Care Institute. Tommy’s passion for golf, tennis, and connecting with friends drew him to his beloved Century Coun-try Club where he was a member for over 50 years and served as President. Tommy will be remembered for living life to the fullest, for his magnetic personality, and for his genuine interest in others. It’s hard to imagine someone with more lifelong friends.

A native of England who attended medical school in London, Dr. Kaur is also a fellow in Geriatrics and Palliative Care. “I combine both specialties every time I see a patient and the Mount Sinai program really facilitates that. Geriatrics is a dis-ci-pline that allows you to see the whole person and Palliative Care ensures that you deliver care based on an understanding of the person and his or her health complex.”

Dr. Hess was a family man, a voracious reader, and a dedicated and ad-mirable mentor. He was a valued member of our community and treated each of his patients with respect and care. He was known for his gentle and caring personality, his kindness, and his understanding. He was a great mentor and role model to many of us, and will be deeply missed. He is survived by his wife, son, daughter-in-law, and five grandchildren. Our thoughts and prayers are with the family in this time of loss.

The idea of a ‘specialty’ unit, staffed and designed to promote wholistic, compassionate, and urgent care for patients and families dealing with advanced stages of disease processes, has become nationally relevant. It is great to be a part of the pioneering work at Mount Sinai and in the Department of Geriatrics and Palliative Medicine,” says Dr. Apoeso.