Hertzberg Director wins Jacobi Medallion

Mount Sinai’s highest honor awarded for excellence in research, at the bedside and in service to the institution.

Dr. R. Sean Morrison, Director of the Hertzberg Palliative Care Institute and the National Palliative Care Research Center (NPCRC), was in March awarded the Jacobi Medallion, Mount Sinai’s most prestigious award for current or former colleagues.

Awarded annually to outstanding Mount Sinai physicians since 1952, the Jacobi Medallion recognizes those who have achieved excellence in three broad categories: in scientific or clinical research, in service to Mount Sinai as an institution, and at the bedside as a clinician, teacher and role model.

Dr. Nathan Kase, Dean Emeritus of the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, was among those who nominated Dr. Morrison for the Medallion, noting his success in all three categories. “I have seen how [Dr. Morrison] takes care of patients in their most frightened hours, answering questions honestly and directly and without inappropriate hopefulness. It is so important to have the knowledge that you will have a guide through difficult days ahead, someone to lean on who will listen to and react to your fears,” said Dr. Kase.

Dr. Morrison also received a nomination from Dr. Nathan Goldstein, Interim Director of the Palliative Medicine Program at Mount Sinai Beth Israel. “Dr. Morrison has revolutionized the evidence base for palliative care, creating a new generation and a new community of palliative care researchers and demonstrating an extraordinary commitment to educating the National Institutes of Health and foundations about the need for evidence in the field.”

“Internally, Dr. Morrison has not only shown a great commitment to the growth of the Hertzberg Palliative Care Institute and now palliative care across the Mount Sinai Health System, but he has provided the kind of mentorship that turns others into leaders,” said Dr. Goldstein.

Dr. Morrison is devoted to increasing the evidence base for palliative care in the US. He was President of the American Academy of Hospice and Palliative Medicine (AAHPM) from 2009 to 2010 and he has received numerous awards and recognition for his contributions to the field. In 2014, he was listed as one of Thomson Reuters’ World’s Most Influential Scientific Minds and as one of 30 Visionaries in Hospice and Palliative Medicine by the AAHPM.
Mount Sinai Hospital hit a trifecta in February when the American Academy of Hospice and Palliative Medicine (AAHPM) named three Hertzberg physicians to a national list of 44 accomplished young leaders in the field. Dr. Laura Gelfman, Dr. Amy Kelley and Dr. Cardinale Smith were all recognized on the AAHPM’s list of Inspiring Hospice and Palliative Medicine Leaders Under 40, released in February.

Dr. R. Sean Morrison, Director of the Hertzberg Palliative Care Institute, said: “I couldn’t be more thrilled that Dr. Gelfman, Dr. Kelley and Dr. Smith have been named inspiring leaders by AAHPM. Each of these physicians is an incredibly talented and committed junior investigator who has demonstrated outstanding potential for a career in patient-oriented research. Their work has and will continue to advance the field of palliative care.”

More than 75 nominations were submitted to the list, bringing attention to exceptional contributions by the next generation of leaders in hospice and palliative medicine. Nominees were evaluated on their involvement in AAHPM, educating others about hospice and palliative medicine, participation in charitable work, mentoring of students or residents and any professional accomplishments that set them apart.

Dr. Gelfman joined Mount Sinai’s Department of Geriatrics and Palliative Medicine as an instructor in July 2013. Her research focus is to examine the role of palliative medicine for patients with heart failure and specifically which interventions may improve the quality of care for such patients.

Dr. Kelley joined the faculty at Mount Sinai in 2009. While serving as an active clinician, she also conducts research on decision-making for older adults with serious medical conditions. Dr. Kelley was the lead researcher in a recent study of the impact of hospice on Medicare costs.

Dr. Smith is an Assistant Professor of Hematology and Medical Oncology at Mount Sinai. Her research focuses on improving the quality of care for patients with cancer, with a special emphasis on minority populations. She is particularly interested in evaluating treatment disparities in cancer care, evaluating determinants of cancer patients’ quality of care and characterizing and finding ways to eliminate barriers to optimal cancer and palliative care.
Maureen Leahy, Clinical Nurse Manager of the Wiener Family Palliative Care Unit, received the 2014 Nurse Leadership Award from Mount Sinai’s Association of the Attending Staff (AAS). The annual award recognizes and celebrates the contributions of extraordinary nursing leaders at Mount Sinai.

As Clinical Nurse Manager, Ms. Leahy oversees nursing care and supervises the nursing staff on the Palliative Care Unit. She has helped to educate Mount Sinai nurses about palliative care through her participation in Mount Sinai nurse training and mentoring programs.

“I try to be a nurse’s nurse,” said Ms. Leahy. “There are many practical demands on the nurses for patient care and documentation, of course, but beyond the day-to-day practice of nursing I feel like my contribution here is to help the nurses develop their art. I want them to come to work feeling well and competent and generous of spirit.”

The nomination criteria for the award include compassion, motivation, clinical expertise, outstanding relationships with co-workers, patients and medical staff, communication skills, continuing education, mentorship and serving as a role model to others.

Dr. R. Sean Morrison, Director of the Hertzberg Palliative Care Institute, said that these qualities “only scratch the surface” of the many talents Ms. Leahy brings to her role. “I couldn’t be more thrilled that she has been selected for this award and that the qualities our palliative care team has recognized since she began working with us are known to the larger institution.”

Ms. Leahy is the third nurse from the Hertzberg Palliative Care Institute to receive the award, joining Jay Horton and Jane Morris. Ms. Leahy joined the Hertzberg Palliative Care Institute in October 2012 as the Palliative Care Unit's first Clinical Nurse Manager. Previously, she was Nurse Manager at Tidewell Hospice in Port Charlotte, Florida, and helped establish a palliative care program for the Lee Memorial Healthcare System in Fort Myers.
In Memoriam

Sister Frances Whelan

On February 15, the Hertzberg Palliative Care Institute lost a beloved friend and former member of our doula and massage therapy programs, Sister Frances Whelan of the Dominican Sisters of Hope. She was 81 years old.

JD Elder, Massage Therapy Program Coordinator at Hertzberg said: “In addition to a strong spiritual presence, she brought to the bedside the knowledge of several important clinical specialties. Her compassion, advocacy and dedication to our patients and their families cannot be overstated. Her gifts, her mentorship and her friendship will be deeply missed and never forgotten.”

Sister Fran served the poor in the Harlem community for over 60 years, working as a community health nurse, social worker, chaplain and massage therapist. She began working at Mount Sinai as a massage therapist, later becoming a doula when arthritis began to affect her hands. Doulas are specially trained volunteers who provide support and companionship for patients with serious illness.

“Fran made a big difference in the lives of people throughout the years,” said Marianne Gelber, Nurse Practitioner and Co-Coordinator of the Palliative Care Doula Program at Mount Sinai. “She had a generosity of spirit and kept learning new ways to give to the disadvantaged and the sick.”

The West Lecture was established by Susie West in memory of her husband and in honor of Dr. Diane Meier, Director of the Center to Advance Palliative Care and formerly Director of the Hertzberg Palliative Care Institute, both at Mount Sinai. Now in its 19th year, the lecture has had great success as a forum for discussing palliative care, aging research and healthcare policy.

2015 Douglas West Memorial Lecture with Dr. Atul Gawande

Dr. Atul Gawande, surgeon, public health journalist and bestselling author of three books delivered the annual Douglas West Endowed Memorial Lecture on April 15.

In his latest book, “Being Mortal: Illness, Medicine and What Matters in the End,” Dr. Gawande shares his professional and personal reflections on aging, serious illness and the importance of listening carefully to those nearing the end of their lives. He calls for a change in the philosophy of healthcare to focus not on prolonging life at any cost, but instead to focus on preserving quality of life as defined by the patient as an individual.
Mount Sinai Hospital and Mount Sinai Beth Israel have combined their palliative care fellowships into a single academic program spanning both campuses. The combination will expose students to a broad variety of clinical settings in two hospitals with very different missions – one at the cutting edge of medical research and the other at the heart of a vibrant urban community – helping to create a workforce better equipped to meet the needs of seriously ill patients in a complex healthcare system. The first integrated fellowship class will begin in July 2015. Fellows are physicians who have completed their training in medicine and wish to gain additional experience and training in a specialty such as palliative care.

Dr. Elizabeth Lindenberger, Director of the Hospice and Palliative Medicine Fellowship said: “This will make our fellowship program the premier in the US – it will be the largest fellowship program and will provide one of the richest and most diverse academic experiences for learners as compared to any other program in the country.”

The breadth of experience will include both inpatient and outpatient consultations, work with inpatients on the Wiener Family Palliative Care Unit at Mount Sinai Hospital, work with hospice patients on Mount Sinai Beth Israel’s inpatient unit and other opportunities to work with outpatients in the community.

“It’s one fellowship experience with some very different components,” said Dr. Nathan Goldstein, Interim Director of the Palliative Medicine Program at Mount Sinai Beth Israel. “We have used what could have been a very difficult transition through the merger to innovate the fellowship program and turn it into a win-win-win for the fellows, faculty and patients and their families.”

Dr. Goldstein took leadership of Mount Sinai Beth Israel’s palliative care program last July. He has since worked closely with Mount Sinai Beth Israel’s administration and his colleagues uptown at Mount Sinai Hospital to stabilize and expand the program and to educate clinicians in other departments about the benefits of palliative care.

The combined fellowship is the latest in a series of efforts to enrich the Mount Sinai Beth Israel program. Two new fellows are expected to join the faculty in July 2015. Dr. Goldstein is developing a consultation service for the Intensive Care Unit and he is working on better palliative care integration with emergency department services. He hopes to increase his nursing staff and add a full-time chaplain in the coming year.
To cure sometimes, to relieve often, to comfort always

Fourth Century French Proverb