

Vol. I

January 2024

Letter from the Chief



Raya Kheirbek, MD

Welcome to our inaugural issue. This newsletter is a platform dedicated to highlighting the multifaceted aspects of our young division's work. In this and future editions, we aim to delve deeper into the nuances of our field—offering a comprehensive view of the endeavors and achievements of our division members.

In each issue, we will delve into specific topics and tips relevant to geriatric and palliative care, aiming to deepen understanding and spark conversations among readers. Our goal is to collectively grow in our field. We also plan to share practical advice and approaches to help improve our healthcare system. This reflects our dedication to not just offering excellent care, but to also refining the environment we work in.

Your thoughts and feedback are pivotal. You, valued reader, will help us shape our content to better align with your needs and interests. Your input will guide the direction of our newsletter, ensuring it stays useful and pertinent for everyone.

University of Maryland School of Medicine Palliative Medicine Newsletter

What's New



Leah Couture, MD



Ruth Borkoski, RN



Steve Eveland, RN

We were delighted to have Dr. Leah Couture join our team in August. Dr. Couture is a graduate of the University of Maryland School of Medicine, class of 2013. She is a board-certified internist and palliative medicine physician. We are elated to share that she has already established her presence in the Greenbaum Cancer Center.

In September, we welcomed Ruth Borkoski to the team as our second RN. She has quickly learned the ropes of the department under the guidance of our long-time RN, Steve Eveland.

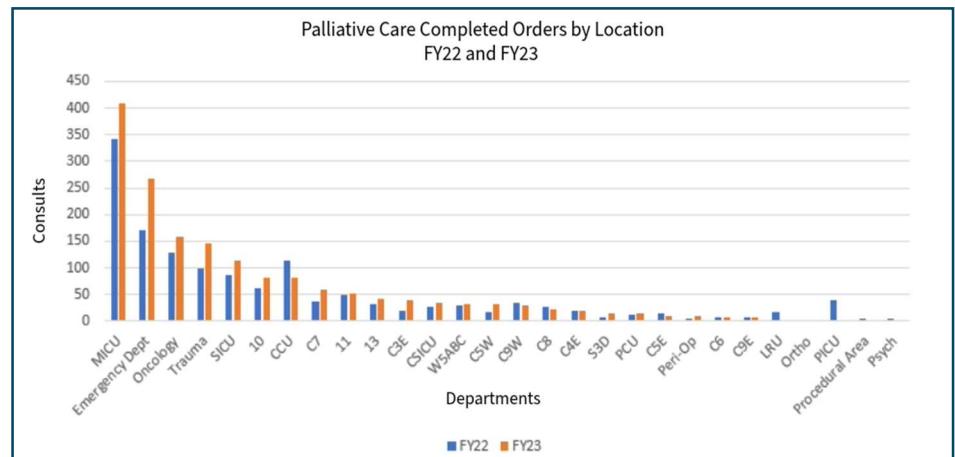
This January we bid farewell to our long-time RN, Steve Eveland. Steve has moved to Midtown to help take on additional Pall Med duties. Steve has been a beacon of gentle strength and unwavering care during his time here. As he embarks on his new journey beyond the walls of our hospital, we bid him good luck and heartfelt thanks. Steve's years of service, marked by his tireless dedication and a profound empathy, have left indelible impressions on the lives he has touched with grace and kindness. His legacy will continue to inspire us, and we wish his path forward to be as enriching and fulfilling.



A group photo from the division's holiday party. Pictured: Danish Jilani, Deb Zuercher, Ruth Borkoski, Raya Kheirbek, Beth Guizzardi, Stacey Bridges, Tara Armstrong, Graeme Thistlewaite, Sydney Israel, Sarah Whitehead, Talibah Anderson, Justin Price, and Steve Eveland.

MICU and ED Referrals Top All Others

The remarkable initiatives of the **MICU** and **ED** teams in advocating for early referrals to Palliative Medicine deserves our highest accolade. This proactive approach has masterfully intertwined concurrent palliative care with ongoing disease-modifying treatments, leading to a notable reduction in hospital mortality and length of stay. More importantly, this integrated care model has tremendously improved the experiences of patients and their families, offering them comfort and support, as well as setting a new standard for compassionate, holistic healthcare. Congratulations to everyone involved for this monumental achievement in patient care, and for truly making a difference in the lives of those we serve.



Tiger Sarah Whitehead
to get your own Pall
Med reference card and
pocket guide!

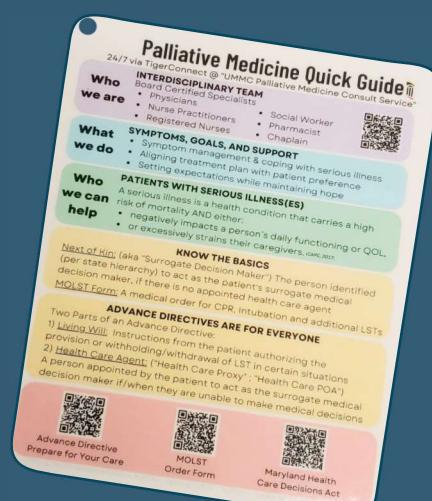
Sarah Whitehead, CRNP and Lauren Becker, MD spearheaded the creation of Pal ICU badge cards detailing the Procedure for Family Meetings, in addition to pocket guides for Pall Med & Pain Mgmt.

Narrative Medicine

The field of Narrative Medicine has emerged as a transformative approach to augment self-awareness and patient-centered care. Our curriculum cultivates narrative humility, fosters active listening, and prompts reflection within a complex, diverse, and ever changing interprofessional team. Meetings focus on prompted writing exercises and group reflection sessions. Providers engage in attentive listening, craft personal responses, and share their narratives in a safe environment. Continued work is done to publish reflections across a variety of platforms. Held in Paca-Pratt the fourth Thursday of the month at 1pm. If interested, please contact Cristina LaFon at clafon@som.umaryland.edu.

Check out Dr. Leah Couture's recent piece [here](#).

Editor, Cristina LaFon



What is Palliative Care?

Palliative and supportive care is a specialty of medicine dedicated to elevating the quality of life for individuals grappling with serious illness. It achieves this by comprehensively addressing pain and other distressing symptoms while also providing robust psycho-social and spiritual support. This care ensures that treatment plans are harmonious with well-informed medical decisions across various healthcare settings. An interdisciplinary team collaborates closely with a patient's existing medical and surgical teams, crafting a tailored plan that centers on the patient's needs. This approach not only enhances the patient's quality of life, but also positively impacts their family.

Consults can be ordered through UMMC Palliative Medicine Consults

Pall Med Didactics

Grand Rounds – 2nd Thursday of the month at 1pm

Journal Club – 3rd Thursday of the month at 12pm

Difficult Case Discussion – once per quarter

Did You Know?

Sydney Israel, PharmD and Rachel Nathan, MD are happy to announce that '**UMMC MED Terminal Ventilator Withdrawal Supplemental**' is now live and ready to use in Epic. The order set is meant to be used for patients whose goal is to be fully comfortable as they are dying, as well as provide guidance on the terminal extubation process in addition to end-of-life symptom management. Please Tiger Drs. Israel and Nathan with feedback.

Faculty News



Rachel Nathan, MD

Dr. Nathan recently garnered recognition with an award for her exemplary efforts in educating medical students. She invites her trainees to engage compassionately with their patients. This accolade serves not only as a testament to her skill in imparting clinical expertise, but also highlights her role in shaping the future of healthcare—a future where sensitivity and care are as paramount as medical intervention. Her approach, blending scientific rigor with narrative empathy, makes her a beacon for future generations of healthcare professionals.



Ila Mulasi, MD

Dr. Mulasi has published a thought-provoking patient story in the NEJM that begs readers to consider the availability and access of medical care in the U.S. to patients who would be considered “other”. What are undocumented workers, immigrants, and foreign visitors to do if an ailment arises? Pushing readers to confront current options and consider what better there may be, [***E Pluribus Unum***](#) is worth a read.



Justin Price, MD

Dr. Price has been instrumental in enhancing our partnership with the Critical Care Committees, focusing on education and collaborative expansion in palliative care. His work is key in blending practical education and increased efforts with the aim to improve both caregiver skills and patient wellbeing. This initiative continues our commitment to combining internal medicine expertise with compassionate care.



Gabriel Lutz, MD, PhD

Dr. Lutz presented at the 2023 GSA on “The Hidden Toll of Incarceration: Exploring the Link Between Incarceration Histories and Pain Among Older Adults in the United States.” Using HRSA data, he explored the association between incarceration histories and the reporting of moderate-to-severe pain and pain with physical limitations. This association was found to be strong and remained after adjusting for various factors. This study spotlights the need to address pain in individuals with incarceration histories, particularly among vulnerable groups.
doi: [10.1093/geroni/igad116](https://doi.org/10.1093/geroni/igad116)



VITALtalk is a free, evidence-based app for clinicians seeking to train their communication skills with seriously ill patients and families. Customized tips for your discipline can help you through moments where you feel unsure what to say or how to respond. Users can peruse tips by topic—serious news, prognosis, family conferences, goals of care, and more—or get notified of daily tips. Try it out and over time your practice will improve.

VitalTalk is available on desktop and for download on Apple and Android [devices](#).



Additional good times had by division members at our 2023 holiday party. Pictured: Leah Couture, Graeme Thistlewaite, Sydney Israel, Steve Eveland, Geriatrics resident, and Tara Armstrong.

Our Inaugural Remembrance Program

Representing *Unity, Memory, and Dedication*, our UMD-themed Remembrance Program was a moving event that drew a diverse and compassionate assembly of families and friends. All united to commemorate the lives of those who received the palliative medicine team's support during their loved one's hospital stay. This gathering transcended its title, becoming a sacred space where stories of love and grief were shared. It left an enduring mark on all of those in attendance.

The entire palliative medicine team stood in solidarity with the families of those they had cared for. It was a moment where boundaries between roles dissolved and everyone came together as a cohesive unit, bound by a shared mission to provide comfort, dignity, and solace during a time of great vulnerability. Families spoke of the deep connections formed with their loved ones, recounting moments of joy and enduring bonds that transcended illness and suffering.

Our event served as a testament to the profound impact of palliative care; a sincere sense of unity was forged among participants. It was a reminder that in the realm of palliative medicine, every life and every story is an attestation to the enduring power of human connection and compassion. The Remembrance Program underscored the importance of holistic care, where medical expertise, emotional support, and spiritual guidance intertwine to support patients and their families through life's most challenging transitions. It not only honored those who passed but also celebrated the resilience of the human spirit and the unbreakable bonds of community that form in times of need.



Justin Price, Graeme Thistlewaite, and Deb Zuercher pose for a candid shot before the event.



A group shot from the event featuring Tara Armstrong, Raya Kheirbek, Ruth Borkoski, Deb Zuercher, Steve Eveland, Rutvij Pandya, Justin Price, Cristina LaFon, Graeme Thistlewaite, and Gabriel Lutz.

Bridging Specialties: Insight into Complex Care

A bidirectional flow of knowledge deepens our collective understanding of the interplay between palliative medicine and other medical fields—something that is crucial for delivering comprehensive patient care. Let us know what the Top 10 insights from your specialty are that you think palliative care practitioners should know. Email Tara to talk with the team at tarmstrong@som.umaryland.edu.