

GERIATRICS

AT MOUNT SINAI



Mount
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Geriatrics Newsletter • Spring/Summer 2021

The Brookdale Department Improves Access to COVID-19 Vaccines for All Older Adults

As soon as COVID-19 vaccines were available for persons over the age of 75 in December, the Brookdale Department of Geriatrics and Palliative Medicine deployed a multipronged approach to ensuring that all patients interested in receiving the vaccine had access to it. The department diverted all available resources to connecting patients with vaccine appointments across Mount Sinai campuses, throughout the city, and into residences of homebound persons.

Clinical and administrative professionals ensured that all technologically savvy and equipped patients knew how to secure vaccination appointments. Patients who needed technological assistance were paired with high school volunteers, who scheduled appointments and relayed the logistics between patients, caregivers, and physicians. More extensive planning, however, was required for homebound patients of the Mount Sinai at Home service lines.

“We care for thousands of New York City residents who are at high risk for poor outcomes if they contract COVID-19, and yet given their current circumstances, are unable to access vaccine locations,” said Dr. Linda DeCherrie, Clinical Director of Mount Sinai at Home. “We considered it our responsibility to bridge this gap for our vulnerable, and oftentimes invisible, patients.”

In March, as the one-dose Johnson & Johnson vaccine became available, New York State announced that it would expand efforts to vaccinate homebound older adults. Immediately, medical students from the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai began geographically clustering subgroups of homebound older adults. Physicians and nurses contacted patients to discuss vaccination in advance. And the Mount Sinai Pharmacy provided clinicians with



portable refrigerators, supplies, and trainings.

“So many of our patients were enthusiastic about receiving the vaccine and grateful that they could be protected from COVID-19,” said Dr. DeCherrie. So too, were the caregivers who were able to receive a vaccine in tandem with the patient.

“As the FDA was reviewing the first COVID-19 vaccines, our clinical teams were strategizing on how to match them with our patients – those who could come in for their doses and those who could not,” said Dr. R. Sean Morrison, Ellen and Howard C. Katz Chair of the Brookdale Department of Geriatrics and Palliative Medicine. “Our outpatient providers readied staff and volunteers while Linda and her team advocated fiercely for our homebound patients. I am tremendously proud of our whole team for ensuring that vaccines were available for our patients.” ◀



A Letter from Martha



In April, I had the opportunity to send our nurses, social workers, and care coordinators at the Martha Stewart Centers for Living the new 'Martha Stewart x Easy Spirit Healthcare Clog'. I designed this clog to honor and keep up with the fast-paced and always-in-motion demands of our healthcare workers.

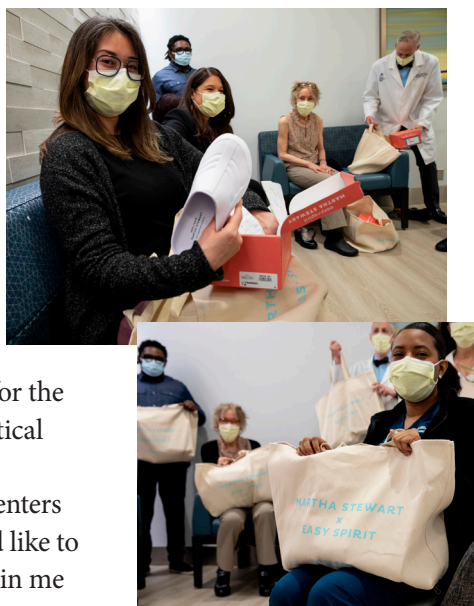
In a segment for *Good Day New York*, I was able to share my profuse gratitude and to once again highlight our clinical teams at Mount Sinai.

It is deeply rewarding to support the Brookdale Department's overall mission to improve the lives of older adults and their loved ones, while also caring for the very real and practical needs of our team members at the Centers for Living. I would like to encourage all to join me in continuing to honor our healthcare heroes.

If you are interested in donating to our work, please visit: <http://giving.mountsinai.org/geriatrics>.

Sincerely,

Martha



Advancing Healthcare for Older Adults through Research and Education

The Brookdale Department of Geriatrics and Palliative Medicine launched the innovative LEAP into Geriatrics Leadership Fellowship, designed to better prepare future healthcare leaders for the aging population in 2019. This first-of-its-kind leadership program trains future executive-level clinicians to create and run health systems that better support our older adult patients. The *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society* recently published research findings that led to the fellowship's creation, which is the first step toward expanding the program nationally.

Almost one in five adults in the United States is over age 65, and there is a growing segment of adults over 85. With only about 7,000 geriatricians in the nation, it is clear that there are not enough trained specialists to meet the needs of this expanding population. The LEAP Fellowship grew out of departmental research that indicated Mount Sinai-trained geriatrics and palliative care medicine fellows frequently move rapidly into leadership positions.

Drs. Helen Fernandez and Elizabeth Lindenberger, Co-Directors of the Fellowship Program, led a survey of graduates from the last 15 years and found that half were in leadership roles within one year, while 100 percent were in leadership roles within six years after graduation. They held a variety of leadership roles, including CEO, president, vice president, and medical director, in various settings, including health systems, nursing home systems, outpatient and inpatient practices, and the VA system.

Despite those impressive statistics, the Brookdale Department found that graduates often had to learn leadership skills on the job. They reported having little formal training in management, mentorship, negotiation, and program development.

"We created the LEAP Fellowship to fill those gaps in knowledge and skills," said Dr. Fernandez. "Our fellows come to us with great passion for medicine and the care of older adults. Through our fellowship program, we help channel that passion to create a satisfying and impactful career—and expand their reach through systems-level leadership training."

The Brookdale Department of Geriatrics and Palliative Medicine has a long history as a pioneer in the field. It was the first medical school in the US to create a dedicated department of geriatrics as well as the first integrated Geriatrics and Palliative Medicine Fellowship Program. The department has trained more than 10 percent of the geriatrics and palliative care workforce in the nation. The LEAP into Geriatrics Leadership Fellowship is an additional step toward their mission of improving care for older adults not only within Mount Sinai but across the country. ◀

PROVIDER
SPOTLIGHT

VANESSA RODRIQUEZ, MD

Associate Medical Director for the Martha Stewart Center for Living



Long before enrolling in the University of Puerto Rico for her undergraduate education, Dr. Vanessa Rodriguez knew that she wanted to be a geriatrician. “I don’t think this career is meant for everyone. I really think it is a calling,” she said. “To be part of another person’s journey, learning about their life, their preferences, their successes, and their tragedies, this is a high honor.”

Dr. Rodriguez joined the Brookdale Department in 2014 for her Integrated Geriatrics and Palliative Medicine Fellowship, an extensive training program for doctors wishing to specialize in the care of older adults, persons with serious illness, and their loved ones. Today, she serves as the Associate Medical Director for the Martha Stewart Center for Living, where she cares for older adults with multifaceted medical needs and complex social determinants of health.

“Geriatrics is a very dynamic career and I am constantly challenged to be creative and think outside the box. I appreciate the relationships with my patients and their loved ones. Oftentimes, they teach me lessons that perhaps no one else would be able to. It is a true blessing.”

Dr. Rodriguez also holds an educator leadership position for medical students, which covers topics such as bias, diversity, interpersonal skills, social determinants of health, and core clinical care. “As a Latina woman physician, I have the duty to be a role model, especially to aspiring young women who wish to pursue a career in medicine.” ◀

Kudos: Special Faculty Awards and Achievements

- **Claire K. Ankuda, MD, MPH, MSc** – awarded the Dr. Harold and Golden Lamport Clinical Research Award from the Faculty Council at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai.
- **Lindsay Dow, MD** – awarded the Dr. Nathan Kase Innovations in Medical Education Award from the Institute for Medical Education (IME) at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai. April 2021.
- **Helen Fernandez, MD, MPH** – awarded the 2021 Dennis W. Jahnigen Memorial Award from the American Geriatrics Society and elected to the American Geriatrics Society Nominating Committee.
- **Emily Franzosa, DrPH** – received pilot award funding through Veterans Affairs Health Services Research and Development Service for her project: “Visualizing Veterans’ Care at Home: Testing the Feasibility of Care Maps as a Method for Assessing Paid and Unpaid Caregiving Roles”.
- **Reena Karani, MD** – elected to the American Geriatrics Society Board of Directors.
- **Albert L. Siu, MD** – awarded the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Faculty Council at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai.

Brookdale Department of Geriatrics and Palliative Medicine



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The Brookdale Department of Geriatrics and Palliative Medicine is proud to offer a new resource for persons caring for a loved one with dementia.

“Navigating Dementia: A Mount Sinai Community for Caregivers” is a private Facebook group that helps members find guidance and support from peers and our dementia experts.

Caring for a loved one with dementia is rarely a straightforward path. Sharing the caregiving journey with peers and clinical experts in the field of dementia can help caregivers gain coping skills, confidence, and new perspectives.

Join Today: <https://mshs.co/Tg>



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RISK ASSESSMENT PROGRAM TAKES AIM AT THE MORBIDITY AND MORTALITY ASSOCIATED WITH FALLS IN OLDER ADULTS

Among older adult patients, falls and fall-related injuries are both common and serious. Every year, millions of older adults fall, and falling once doubles the odds that they will do so again. In these instances, falls can be a significant cause of morbidity, functional dependence, and mortality. To better serve older adult patients, the Brookdale Department of Geriatrics and Palliative Medicine has launched a new Falls Evaluation Clinic. By evaluating patients and providing detailed recommendations for intervention, falls and the negative outcomes they cause can be prevented.

The causes of falls can be complex and difficult to address during a busy primary care appointment. Older adults have an elevated risk due to a number of conditions, including: podiatric problems, visual impairments, medication side effects, and disorders that affect gait. Most older adults also have between 5 and 10 chronic medical concerns, which require follow-up during a typical visit, so it can be challenging to perform a comprehensive falls evaluation at that time.

During the initial evaluation, physicians review the patients' medical conditions and medications and perform a complete falls-focused assessment, evaluating strength, balance, cognition, vision, and more. A social worker meets with patients to discuss their home situation, such as whether they have stairs, rugs, and grab bars. After the evaluation, the team offers recommendations and a nurse follows up to see that necessary appointments and changes occur.

"We are collecting data about the falls clinic to evaluate its effectiveness and hope to grow its reach over time. If our falls clinic creates the positive outcomes we expect, we hope to share this model so that other health systems can join us in the goal of preventing the devastating injuries and deaths caused by falls," said Dr. Nisha Rughwani, Medical Director of the Mount Sinai Morningside Geriatrics Clinic. ◀

