LETTER FROM THE CHIEF

THE LAST SEVERAL MONTHS have been exciting for the MGH Division of Palliative Care as we have embarked upon an historic evaluation of the palliative care needs of our patients at MGH. Under the visionary leadership of Dr. Peter Slavin, President of the MGH, the hospital has convened a task force to devise several strategies to improve care for our patients living with serious illness. The task force, which is comprised of a diverse group of hospital leaders and patients, is using the recently published Institute of Medicine (IOM) monograph as a guide for its work. The IOM publication recommends several strategies to improve care for the millions of patients living with serious illness in the United States. These recommendations include: providing the opportunity for all patients to discuss their goals of care with their clinical team, encouraging health systems to focus on patient engagement strategies to ensure the patient voice is heard, training all front line clinicians in basic primary palliative care skills, and expanding the subspecialty palliative care workforce. MGH was recently named the #1 hospital in the nation by U.S. News & World Report and the Palliative Care Division aims for our work at MGH to be at the forefront of palliative care innovation. We are grateful for the opportunity to partner with Dr. Slavin to achieve this goal. The efforts of the task force will culminate with the release of its recommendations at this year’s Leffert Lecture. The Lecture will be delivered by Atul Gawande, MD, on December 16th. More details about the Lecture follow later in this newsletter.

In this issue, I would also like to highlight some (Continued on page 2)

DORIS THE THERAPY DOG

WE’D LIKE TO INTRODUCE you to the furriest member of the Palliative Care Team: Doris, the Therapy Dog. Doris is a five year old golden retriever who has been specially trained as a therapy dog by NEADS (National Education for Assistance Dog Services, also known as Dogs for Deaf and Disabled Americans), a non-profit located in Princeton, Massachusetts. NEADS is known for their nearly 40 years of experience in training dogs to assist deaf or disabled clients and returning war veterans. In recent years, the organization has expanded its program to include training dogs to work with teachers, clergy, and medical clinicians to provide specialized assistance to students, patients and staff.

A nationally renowned program, NEADS has been at the forefront of assistance dog training and placement across the country for decades. Unique to NEADS, their dog training program entails 12-18 months of training at ten correctional facilities in Massachusetts and Rhode Island. Known as the “Prison PUP Partnership”, the program allows for prison inmates to collaboratively train their puppies with NEADS trainers. Therapy puppies are taught exceptional social interaction, listening and obedience skills, and advanced task work throughout the duration of the training period. To augment the program, NEADS volunteers take the puppies on weekend furloughs to ensure they receive a wide range of experiences, including things like car rides, traffic, grocery stores, and other experiences which will become part of their everyday life once the puppies graduate from the training program. Not only does the Prison PUP Partnership ensure highly trained, sociable Therapy Dogs, it also serves to increase morale and create a sense of meaningfulness among prison inmates. In total, more than 90% of NEADS dogs are trained in the Prison PUP Partnership program, with approximately 50-55 teams (human and canine partners) graduating each year.

In 2011, Dr. Vicki Jackson, Chief of the MGH Palliative Care Division, contacted NEADS in search of a therapy dog to help provide emotional support to patients and staff members at MGH. Within a few months, NEADS had matched Doris to Dr. Jackson, each of whom went through extensive training on animal-assisted therapy in healthcare settings. In addition to the Prison PUP Partnership, in which Doris was trained, Dr. Jackson was also required to attend a week-long therapy dog handler training. Dr. Jackson and Doris are now a certified NEADS team and can be found at MGH bringing smiles and comfort to patients and staff-members alike.

We are thankful for the comforting presence which Doris brings to our patients and staff at MGH. For more information on NEADS, their Prison PUP Partnership Program, and the assistance dogs that they train, please visit their website at www.neads.org.
of the exciting clinical research being conducted by members of our Division. The ePal Project is an innovative approach to educating and improving the pain management of cancer patients at MGH through a smartphone application. We will also feature selected publications from clinicians in our Division that represent research and scholarly contributions here at MGH, nationally, and internationally.

As we strive to be leaders in education, you will hear about our interdisciplinary palliative care fellowship and be introduced to some of this year's fellows.

It is my pleasure and privilege to reflect back on the growth and accomplishments of our Division through each installment of the Palliative Care Newsletter. I also hope we can look ahead together to the bright future of palliative care and the programs and advancements our Division is proud to be a part of. And most importantly, I am glad to have this opportunity to thank you, our donors, colleagues, and team members for all of the work you do for the growing field of palliative care.

Vicki Jackson, MD, MPH
Chief, Division of Palliative Care

SCHOLARLY ARTICLES FROM THE DIVISION OF PALLIATIVE CARE

IN THE MGH DIVISION OF PALLIATIVE CARE, we believe in contributing to the advancement of palliative care not only through providing patient care and education, but also through medical research and scholarly writing. Highlighted below are some recently published articles from clinicians within our department.


Mihir Kamdar, MD, the Associate Director of the MGH Palliative Care Division, Kathleen Doyle, MD, attending physician with the Palliative Care Division, and Todd Rinehart, LICSW, ACHP-SW, social worker with the Palliative Care Division, collaborated with other providers at MGH to publish this article in The New England Journal of Medicine discussing management strategies for a palliative care patient experiencing intractable pain.


Vicki Jackson, MD, MPH, Chief of the Division of Palliative Care, and Eva Chittenden, MD, Director of Educational Programs in the MGH Palliative Care Division, published the results of their study exploring common stressors, coping strategies, and training needs among palliative care clinicians in efforts to inform the development of a targeted resiliency program.


Eric Krakauer, MD, PhD, Director of International Programs at the Harvard Medical School Center for Palliative Care, published this article in The Lancet regarding the provision of surgical palliative care for patients in resource-limited settings who may be beyond a cure but still require surgical palliative care to ameliorate their debilitation.

SAVE THE DATE!

THE MGH PALLIATIVE CARE DIVISION is pleased to announce that this year’s Leffert Lecture keynote speaker will be Dr. Atul Gawande of Brigham & Women’s Hospital and Harvard Medical School. Dr. Gawande is a surgeon, professor, world-renowned writer and recently authored Being Mortal: Medicine and What Matters in the End and Complications. As one of the foremost innovators in healthcare policy and reform, Dr. Gawande will share his unique perspective on the growing importance of palliative care in the American healthcare system. This year’s Leffert Lecture will be held on Wednesday, December 16th, from 4:30 – 6pm in the MGH O’Keefe Auditorium. For more information, or to RSVP to the event, please call 617-724-9197 or email mmspinale@partners.org.
INNOVATIONS IN RESEARCH

INTEGRAL TO MASSACHUSETTS GENERAL HOSPITAL’S MISSION is our innovative research enterprise, known as the Research Institute at Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH). Our research staff is comprised of over 6,000 employees who collectively pursue research on every major disease group known to modern medicine. With grant funding in excess of $760 million annually, the Research Institute represents the largest independent hospital research program in the United States. Over the past two centuries, MGH’s long standing affiliation with Harvard Medical School has resulted in innumerable discoveries, which have profoundly advanced medicine and patient care around the world.

Within the MGH Palliative Care Division, our clinician researchers are actively pursuing projects to advance and promote the field of palliative medicine. One such project is the ePal Project, which is an innovative approach to educating and improving the pain management of cancer patients at MGH. Dr. Mihir Kamdar of the MGH Palliative Care Division and Dr. Kamal Jethawani of the Center for Connected Health have developed a smartphone application which provides guidance from the experts at MGH on how to best manage patients’ cancer pain at home. The application has the ability to intervene with a phone call from a clinician for patients who self-report severe pain that may require immediate attention.

Dr. Kamdar hopes the ePal Project “will serve to create additional contact points with patients in between clinic visits, ensuring more effective pain management and education for patients at home.” Unique to the ePal Project, patients can view videos from their actual MGH providers, who can address common pain management questions and concerns related to their medications. Furthermore, the ePal application increases the level of communication and promotes a feeling of connectedness between patients and their providers. The project has the added benefit of potentially avoiding unnecessary emergency room visits for patients who are struggling to effectively control their pain at home.

The ePal Project is supported by a grant from the McKesson Foundation. It was launched in 2014 at MGH for a small number of cancer patients. Initial results are being compiled and evaluated, with potential plans in the coming years to expand the number and locations of patients participating in the program. For questions or to request more information related to the ePal Project, please contact Dr. Kamdar at mmkamdar@partners.org.

HARVARD INTERPROFESSIONAL PALLIATIVE CARE FELLOWS THRIVE WITH THE SUPPORT OF OUR DONORS

ON JULY 1 the Harvard Interprofessional Palliative Care Fellowship welcomed 13 new fellows. Boasting the largest class size to date at Massachusetts General Hospital and the only interdisciplinary fellowship of its kind offered in the country, this fellowship is made possible in large part through our generous donors. The fellowship class of 2015-2016 is represented by medical doctors, a doctor of osteopathy, nurse practitioners and a social worker. We wish to highlight three of our fellows whose fellowship years were made possible through the philanthropy of our donors.

Keri Oxley Brenner, MD, MPA was first inspired to serve patients with serious illness through her volunteer work at Mother Teresa’s Home for the Dying in Kolkata, India. “My volunteer work in Kolkata ignited my passion to serve patients with terminal illness,” says Brenner. “As physicians, we are frequently invited into the most intimate moments of our patients’ lives, yet it seems even more sacred when we are invited to the space of our patient’s death. It is the most sacred space I know.”

(Continued on back page)
— FELLOWS
(Continued from page 3)

Brenner attended Yale School of Medicine where her honors thesis focused on the phenomenology of suffering with terminal illness. She was awarded the Zuckerman Fellowship through Harvard's Center for Public Leadership and also obtained a Master in Public Administration at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government. Her residency training was in adult psychiatry at Mass General.

“No words can express my gratitude for the generous gift of the donation for my fellowship position. It is an honor and inspiration to work hand-in-hand with attending clinicians who are pioneers in transforming the culture of medicine – deeply invested in patients’ quality of life and the alleviation of suffering.”

Andrew Lawton, MD, received his bachelor’s degree in Romance Languages and Literatures (Spanish & French) from the University of Notre Dame. He earned his MD degree at the Medical College of Wisconsin, and then completed a residency and chief residency in internal medicine at the Oregon Health and Science University. He reports being drawn to this fellowship for multiple reasons. “The Harvard Program has a clear focus on advanced communication training. The program provides fellows with a structure and evidence-base for the communication work we do at the bedside. I was also thrilled by the opportunity to train with nationally-recognized clinician educators and investigators in our field.”

Lawton describes being attracted to the inter-professional nature of the fellowship. “I am excited to learn from not only my physician colleagues, but my nurse-practitioner and social work colleagues as well. I often find myself saying to others, ‘This is a team sport!’ We rely on the unique perspectives and approaches of our nursing and social work colleagues to provide comprehensive, team-based palliative care.”

“I came to nursing as a second career,” says Sudha Natarajan, the 2014-2015 Palliative Care Nurse Practitioner Fellow at MGH. Natarajan, who has a PhD in Molecular and Cellular Pathology from the University of Michigan, and then had a post-doctoral fellowship in the biology of liver transplant rejection, spent her early career in the lab.

“But I missed interacting with people, getting to know their stories and learning what’s important to them,” Natarajan says. “While doing bench research, the disconnect between the work you do and the people it ultimately helps was too large for me to sustain a passion for a research career alone.”

Natarajan went back to school and earned her degree in nursing, and then went on to a Master of Science in Nursing from the MGH Institute of Health Professions. “I reevaluated my career path five years ago after my mother passed away from lung cancer,” says Natarajan. “My family's experience with that was very complicated, but it made me want to use my skills to help people in situations I am uniquely familiar with.”

“That personal relationship with the patient is very important to me,” says Natarajan. “I am passionate about providing high quality patient care and using my research skills to improve the practice of palliative care.”

“The opportunity to have a year to learn in this capacity at Mass General is thrilling,” she says. “This is where ideas start. This is the place other institutions look to for leadership and innovation.”

All three fellows feel deeply grateful that our donors have chosen to invest in palliative care education. The MGH Palliative Care Division wishes to echo the fellows’ gratitude for the support of our donors, who have made this transformative year possible.