



Raya Kheirbek, MD, MPH

As we welcome 2025, I am filled with gratitude and pride for our palliative medicine team. Reflecting on 2024, it was a year of growth, achievement, and meaningful connections.

Together, we expanded our reach, strengthened our mission, and made a tangible difference in the lives of our patients and their families.

One of the highlights of the year was our 2nd Annual Remembrance Event. Seeing families share cherished memories and connect with our team reminded me of the profound impact of our work. We look forward to continuing this tradition in the years ahead.

Another milestone was the expansion of our consultative services to the University of Maryland Medical Center, Midtown Campus. This endeavor reflects our commitment to bringing compassionate, advanced illness care to more communities.

Our team has embraced this challenge with enthusiasm, building new partnerships and enhancing patient-centered care. In 2025, we aim to deepen these collaborations and continue driving innovation and quality improvement. As we grow, we also strive to embody the principles of high reliability in every aspect of our work. By fostering a culture of vigilance, adaptability, and continuous learning, we ensure that our care remains safe, effective, and centered on the needs of patients and their families.

Lastly, I am delighted to welcome the incredible new colleagues who joined our team this past year. Their diverse expertise and shared dedication to our mission will undoubtedly enrich our work and the care we provide. Thank you for your hard work, passion, and unwavering commitment.

Warm regards,

In this newsletter you can expect:

Faculty & staff profile highlights and news

Downtown campus update & division news

Midtown campus initiation

Remembrance Event

Did you know?

Research Highlight

The Palliative Care Team is excited to participate in the LiBBY Study, the first cannabis research study to be conducted on our campus. Funded by the National Institute on Aging (NIA) of the National Institutes of Health (NIH). This groundbreaking study explores the potential benefits of an oral combination of Delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) and cannabidiol (CBD) in reducing agitation for individuals with Alzheimer's disease or other dementias who are eligible for hospice care. LiBBY is the first study of its kind to focus on improving the quality of end-of-life stages for patients with dementia and agitation. Read more about the inspiration behind [LiBBY](#).

For questions about this study please contact Rebecca Hudson at rhudson@som.umaryland.edu.



Rebecca Hudson,
Clinical Research
Specialist

WELCOME TO THE TEAM!



Sherine Talaat, MD, PhD

Dr. Sherine Talaat, MD, PhD is a new faculty member in our division. Dr Talaat is a distinguished physician-scientist with a remarkable academic and clinical background. She earned her medical degree with advanced standing and her PhD in Biochemistry and Molecular Biology from the University of North Dakota, where she also completed her residency in Internal Medicine. Dr Talaat further refined her expertise through a fellowship in Hospice and Palliative Medicine at Jamaica Hospital Medical Center in New York.

Her advanced training reflects her dedication to delivering exceptional care to patients with complex medical needs. She is dual board certified in Hospice and Palliative Medicine as well as Internal Medicine.

With a unique combination of clinical excellence, research and a passion for education, Dr. Talaat is poised to make a lasting impact on our division.

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Assistant Professor

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Medicine

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Stacy Gwatura, APRN

Stacy Gwatura is an experienced Advanced Practice Registered Nurse specializing in palliative care and bioethics. With a Master of Science in Nursing from Vanderbilt University and a BSN from Johns Hopkins University, she brings a strong academic and clinical foundation. Stacy's expertise includes providing advanced illness care, developing pain management policies and educating healthcare teams. She has served as a Nurse Practitioner at Sinai Hospital of Baltimore and as a clinical preceptor for adult/geriatric nurse practitioner students.

She is certified as an adult and geriatric nurse practitioner (ANCC) as well as a hospice and palliative care nurse practitioner (HPNA). In 2020 she earned her certification as a healthcare ethics consultant thru the American Society of Bioethics and Humanities (ASBH) and enjoys serving on the hospital clinical ethics committee.

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Rachel Ondrish, APRN

Rachel Ondrish, APRN is an experienced Palliative Nurse Practitioner who will be working at our UMMC Midtown campus. Rachel has been a Palliative Nurse Practitioner for seven years. She received her BSN from Coppin State and her MSN in Adult Geriatric and Primary Care from Waldern University. With a passion for working in palliative care, Rachel started her career at Gilchrist as an Inpatient Palliative Nurse Practitioner located at Howard County General.

She grew their palliative program across the county and is now able to bring that experience to our team.

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Jennifer Gray, BS

Jennifer Gray, BS joined the administrative side of our team in October of 2024. A graduate of Oklahoma State University with a Bachelor of Science in Business and Marketing, she has experience in various industries. She has worked in healthcare in different capacities; most specifically with advanced practice clinicians as well as MDs, PhDs and PharmDs.

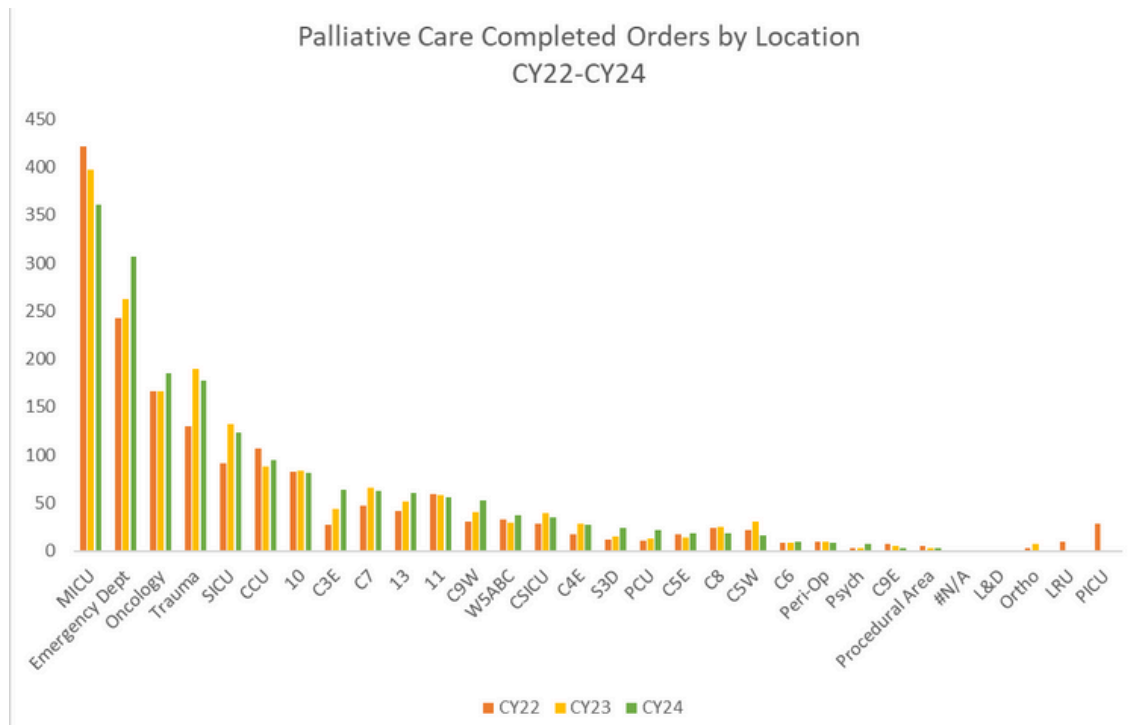
Prior to working in healthcare, Jennifer earned her teaching credential and taught in elementary education for seven years.

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Downtown Campus Palliative Care Update

Palliative Care Completed Orders by Location
CY22-CY24



Education tidbits
2023/2024
Number of trainees: 78
Number of lectures: 111

DIVISION NEWS

Conferences

- In September of 2024 Dr Price was a guest speaker at the **Mercy Department of Medicine's Grand Rounds**. He spoke on Palliative care and the healthcare disparities for African Americans.
- In October of 2024 Dr Mulasi, Dr Lutz and Steve Eveland MBA, RN, CHPN, attended the **McGill International Palliative Care Congress** in Montreal Canada. Dr Mulasi and Steve Eveland presented their abstract *Stories People Tell: Integrating HIV/AIDS & Palliative Medicine*. The event was attended by over 1500 delegates from 65 countries.
- Dr Talaat was a guest speaker at the **International Turkish Gastric Congress** that took place in Izmir, Turkey October 11-13, 2024. Her presentation was titled *Palliative Care Interventions and Procedures In Gastric Cancer*.
- In February of 2025 Dr Talaat and Dr Nathan will attend the **Annual Assembly of Hospice and Palliative Medicine Conference (AAHPM)** in Denver. Dr Nathan will be presenting *Remembrance: A Palliative Care Team and Loved Ones Honor Patients' Lives Together*.

Community Partnerships

- We are excited to strengthen our collaboration with community hospice and palliative care programs. Together, we aim to enhance access to compassionate, patient-centered care, while building a supportive network for individuals and families navigating serious illnesses.

UPCOMING EVENTS



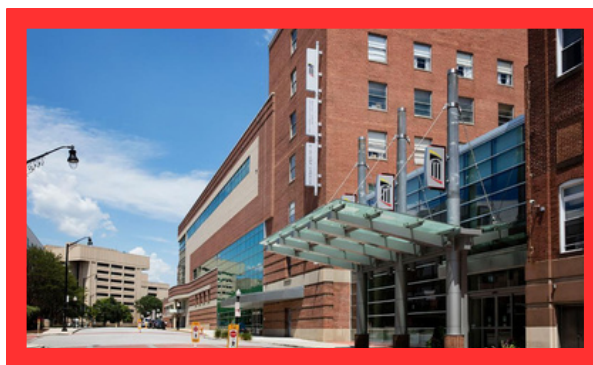
Join us for the Department of Medicine Grand Rounds on **February 19th at 12:00 PM EDT**, featuring **Dr. Eduardo Bruera, MD, FACP, FAAHPM, FT**, McGraw Chair and Professor at the Department of Palliative, Rehabilitation, & Integrative Medicine at The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center. Dr. Bruera will present on "Integration of Palliative Care: Structures, Processes, and Outcomes," offering invaluable insights into advancing care for patients with serious illnesses. Don't miss this opportunity to engage with one of the foremost leaders in palliative medicine.



Join us in **April** for the 4th annual Poetry Fest, a space to share your creative voice and connect through poetry. Poems will be shared by faculty and staff. **Grace Cavalieri**, a Maryland poet laureate, will be our special guest speaker. Last year's fest featured over 20 original poems and brought together 50 participants for a day of reflection and artistic exchange.

If you are interested in participating in this event, please contact Tara Armstrong tarmstrong@som.umaryland.edu or Jennifer Gray jennifer.gray@som.umaryland.edu.

Midtown Campus Palliative Care Initiation

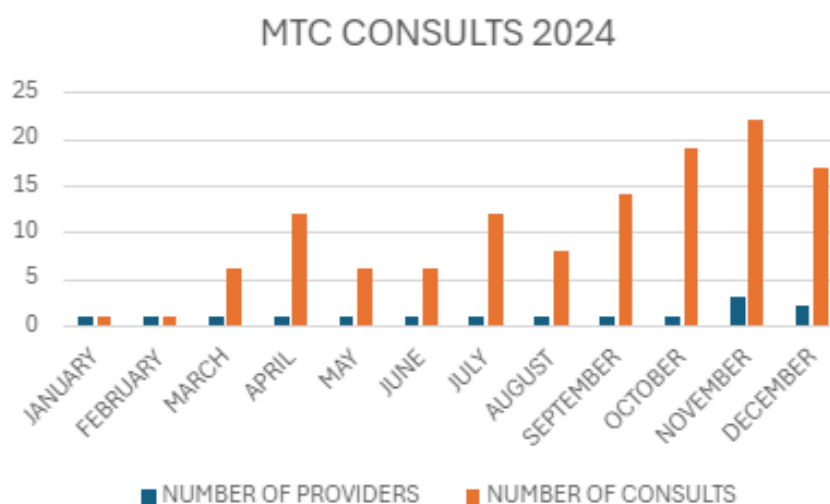


OUR INPATIENT TEAM

Steve Eveland, RN
Palliative Nurse Navigator and
Rachel Ondrish, APRN, Palliative
Nurse Practitioner make up our
inpatient team.

UMMC Midtown Campus
827 Linden Ave
Baltimore, MD 21201
To connect with Palliative Care,
call 410-225-8316 and ask for our
team.

www.umms.org/midtown.



For a palliative care consult:

- >Clinician places an order in EPIC
- >A message is triggered to "MTC Palliative" via Tiger
- >The patient is added to the consult list
- >A palliative clinician contacts the referring provider through Tiger

Teaching Moment: *The Patient's Voice*

In her hospice bed, Tina reflects with quiet clarity. "You are 100% full of all the best parts of life," she says, "and 100% certain this wonderful existence is coming to an end." There's no fear, only acceptance. Hospice, she explains, is a place of deep connection. "People speak with complete honesty," she shares. "It's a gift, tied with a bow of vulnerability." Conversations are meaningful, distractions gone. "These have been some of the most peaceful and happy days I've ever had."

Her days are marked by small acts of love. A friend brought her favorite childhood candy. "Now, I'm well-stocked," she says with a smile. Her husband, though weary, remains devoted. "He always makes sure I get extra pie," she notes tenderly, calling it "supreme love."

Hospice, she says, isn't just about comfort. It's about presence and gratitude. Wrapped in warmth and surrounded by care, she faces the end with grace. "The goal is to make you comfortable and at peace," she says simply. In this space, she has found both.

-Tina was a beloved wife to Mitchell Brown, mother to two sons Jamie and Parker and a grandmother to Lydia.



Palliative Medicine's 2nd Annual Remembrance Event

With over 25 families in attendance, on November 2nd Palliative Medicine hosted its 2nd annual remembrance event to honor patients that had passed away. It was a meaningful afternoon for both the families and clinicians. It gave families a chance to reconnect with the clinicians that treated their loved ones. Our team read their favorite poems to help provide hope and support. Families were given the opportunity to share special memories and communicate with others in similar situations. We look forward to this annual event to give back to the community and show our support. One family shared that this event helped them find closure and feel supported in their grief. Such words inspire us to continue this tradition.

Afterglow by Helen Lowrie Marshall (Read by Gabriel Lutz, MD, PhD)

*I'd like the memory of me to be a happy one.
I'd like to leave an afterglow of smiles when life is done.
I'd like to leave an echo whispering softly down the ways, of
happy times and bright sunny days.
I'd like the tears of those who grieve to dry before the sun; of
happy memories that I leave when life is done.*



Family Feedback

After the event we asked the families for feedback and received the following:

"Thank you for your attention and support. God bless you!"

"This was great! Thanks, and I hope that you continue to do it."

"I appreciate the love and support from your team."

"All of the care team was excellent."

"We felt extremely supported by all the nurses and doctors; they were very loving and helpful during the whole painful and difficult illness."

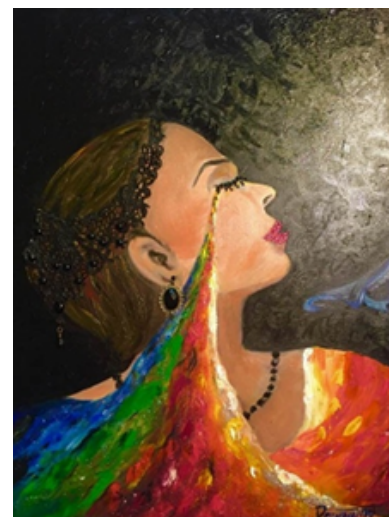


A Word From our Chaplain Deb Zuercher

This painting, *Emotions*, by Dr. Douna Montazerlghaem, first appeared in the *Journal of Pain and Symptom Management* in September 2019. Part of a series highlighting physicians' emotional experiences, it captures the weight of trauma and the silent resilience often expected of caregivers.

The subject stands proud yet vulnerable, tears flowing in vibrant colors, each representing a memory that shaped her. The black background underscores her loneliness and the tension between her inner struggles and outward composure.

Featured in the *Expressions of Clinician Well-Being Project* by the National Academy of Medicine, this piece reminds us of the profound beauty in the challenges we face and the humanity in our work,



Did you know?



Articles

In this month's division newsletter, we spotlight Sarah Wildman's poignant essay, *If My Dying Daughter Could Face Her Mortality, Why Couldn't the Rest of Us?* This powerful piece highlights the emotional gaps in pediatric palliative care and the profound lessons learned from her daughter Orli's journey. The essay resonates deeply with our division's mission to provide compassionate, holistic care for patients and families facing life-limiting illnesses. Additionally, the thoughtful responses to this essay, including one from our division chief, Dr Raya Kheirbek, emphasize the critical need for integrated palliative care and bereavement support. Explore these reflections here. <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/11/25/opinion/children-cancer-grief.html>

Education

When families say "we are hoping for a miracle" we respond with AMEN. When families face a loved one's illness, hope often becomes their anchor-even in wishing for a miracle. For healthcare providers, balancing this hope with honest expectations is challenging. The AMEN approach offers a compassionate way to foster trust and connection. Learn more in this *Journal of Oncology Practice* article by Cooper et al. [amen_bridging_the_gaps_between_faith_hope_medicine_cooper_2014_asco.pdf](https://www.asco.org/education/amen-bridging-the-gaps-between-faith-hope-medicine-cooper-2014-asco.pdf)

Key Steps of the AMEN:

- Affirm: Acknowledge their hope, e.g., "I am hopeful too."
- Meet: Share in their perspective, e.g., "I join you in hoping for a miracle."
- Educate: Provide medical insights gently, e.g., "Let's discuss some considerations."
- No matter what: Reassure them of your support, e.g., "I'll be here every step of the way."

Books

Briefly Perfectly Human by Alua Arthur, a New York Times bestseller, is a tender and profound meditation on life. Arthur a death doula, shares her personal journey alongside the intimate stories of those she has guided through their final days. With raw honesty and deep compassion, she reminds us that facing mortality is not about fear but about discovering how to live with purpose and connection.

This is not just a book about dying-it's a celebration of the beauty, messiness, and resilience of being human. It's heartfelt, wise, and a gentle nudge to cherish what truly matters.

<https://www.penguin.co.uk/books/468269/briefly-perfectly-human-by-arthur-alua/9781846048548>

