

Annual Report

Palliative Research
CENTER



2023



Letter from the Director

Dear friends,

It's been a busy and fulfilling year for the Palliative Research Center (PaRC). Our community has come together to celebrate the many successes of our faculty, staff and trainees. We have supported each other through career and personal transitions. And we have worked in teams to develop and pursue impactful research projects that will improve the lives of people with serious illness and their families.

This year we collectively mourned the death of Dr. Randy Curtis, a beloved mentor, colleague, and founding member of our PaRC advisory board. Among the many things I learned from Randy, the continual reminder that 'people are more important than papers' will always stick with me. While I am proud to share PaRC's research impact and funding, it is the people behind these numbers that make our Center what it is today.

PaRC people have continually stepped up to mentor, teach, plan, build, and inspire our community. People like Dr. Betty Ferrell, whose keynote speech at our Retreat, reflecting on her 45 years as a nurse and her gratitude for a career that has involved 'flying the plane while building it,' provided inspiration for attendees at all career stages to pursue meaning and impact in our careers. (If you did not catch her speech and need a bit of inspiration, I highly recommend you listen here).

A mentee of mine recently commented that while working on a new research proposal she felt like a fish trying to climb a tree while doing the Michael Jackson moonwalk.

Her analogy is a funny and important reminder that this work is hard and we all need support.



I am personally grateful to PaRC for being an engaged, thoughtful, and highly supportive palliative care research community. Thank you to the members, colleagues, funders and friends who continue to motivate and inspire us.

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Yael Schenker'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Yael Schenker
PaRC Director

PaRC by the Numbers

FY 2023 Research Impact & Funding



PaRC faculty and fellows led **39 active grants**.

Total active grant funding FY 2023: **>\$11.5 million**

78 mentees

PaRC supported **78 mentees**, including medical students, residents, fellows, post-doctoral fellows, and junior faculty.

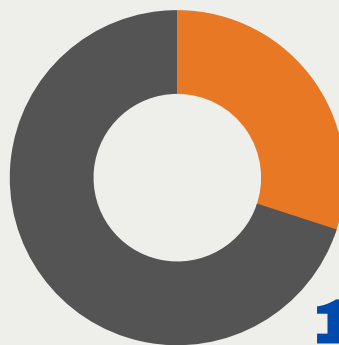


94



PaRC faculty authored **94 publications**.

20 grants submitted



7 grants funded

13 grants pending

Impact at a Glance

PEOPLE

- PaRC welcomed one new **postdoctoral fellow** and two new **administrative** team members.

PROGRAMS

- Four first-year medical students completed the **Gleitsman Student Diversity in Palliative Care Research Award** program.
- Fifteen junior faculty members participated in the **Junior Faculty Visiting Professor Program**.

PARTNERSHIPS

- We collaborated with the **Section of Palliative Care and Medical Ethics** to produce a shared quarterly newsletter.
- We strengthened community relationships by expanding a **hospice-centered educational program** for Black lay ministers in Pittsburgh.

EVENTS

- The **2022 Annual Retreat** brought together > 80 attendees across the medical and scientific community to present and discuss current palliative care research, as well as policy opportunities to advance palliative care.
- Thirteen PaRC-affiliated researchers collaborated to present poster presentations and talks at the **2023 American Academy of Hospice and Palliative Medicine (AAHPM) Annual Assembly** in Montreal.
- Monthly **PERCOLATE** works-in-progress sessions provided attendees with critical, interdisciplinary feedback on ongoing research projects.
- Quarterly **Innovations in Palliative Care Science Speaker Seminars** brought together researchers from across Pitt to discuss novel methods and resources that are applicable to palliative care research.

OUTREACH



@PittPalCare

1096 followers

♡ 607 likes 👁 84k impressions

➡ 225 retweets 🖱 307 link clicks



Newsletter

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Recruitment & Growth

PaRC welcomed two new staff members:



Maria Belin

Administrative
Program Manager



Ariel Leath

Student
Researcher

Dr. Piscitello joined PaRC as a Postdoctoral Fellow:



Gina Piscitello

Clinical Assistant
Professor of Medicine

I am so fortunate for the opportunity to work with PaRC, which has opened access to new research opportunities that I could not pursue elsewhere.

Gina Piscitello, MD, MS

PaRC People



PaRC is an interdisciplinary team of faculty members and postdoctoral fellows.

PaRC Core Faculty and Fellows

Yael Schenker, MD, MAS, FAAHPM (Director)

Justin Yu, MD (Assistant Director, Community Outreach & Collaboration)

Robert Arnold, MD, FAAHPM

Amar Basal, MD, FASN

Sarah Belcher, PhD, RN, OCN

Hailey Bulls, PhD, MA

Kelly Wolenberg Harris, MD

Carissa Low, PhD

Jennifer Seaman, PhD, RN

Jessica Merlin, MD, PhD, MBA

Margaret Rosenzweig, PhD, CRNP

Jane Schell, MD, FNKF, FAAHPM

Gina Piscitello, MD, MS

Jennifer Prukowski, PharmD

Teresa Hagan Thomas, PhD, RN

Douglas White, MD, MAS

Risa Wong, MD

PaRC Advisory Board

Robert Arnold, MD, FAAHPM

Betty Ferrell, PhD

Kimberly Johnson, MD

Jean Kutner, MD, MPH/MSPH

R. Sean Morrison, MD

Kathryn Pollak, PhD

Doris Rubio, PhD

Liliana Viera-Ortiz, MD

University of Pittsburgh

City of Hope Medical Center

Duke University

University of Colorado

Icahn School of Medicine

Duke University

University of Pittsburgh

University of Puerto Rico

Program & Project Highlights



Select Awards, Grants & Recognitions

**ROBERT
ARNOLD**

Featured on the **GerIPal podcast** and recognized for **35 years at UPMC**.

**HAILEY
BULLS**

Received a **K08 award from NCI** for her research on opioid stigma and cancer pain and the **Supporting Our Scientists Award** from Pitt CTSI. Accepted into the **Society of Behavioral Medicine Diversity Institute for Emerging Leaders**.

**KELLY
HARRIS**

Received the **2023 Kornfeld Scholar Program Award** from the National Palliative Care Research Center.

**JESSICA
MERLIN**

Received a **K24 from NIDA** for mid-career mentorship and the **NIH HEAL Director's Award for Mentorship**. Accepted to the **Executive Leadership in Academic Medicine** program.

**GINA
PISCITELLO**

Selected as **AAHPM Education SIG Co-Chair** and accepted to the **2023 AAHPM Research Scholars Program**.

**MARGARET
ROSENZWEIG**

Appointed as an **Oncology Nursing Society Scholar-in-Residence**. Featured in **PITTMED** article on novel doula program for Black women experiencing breast cancer.

**JANE
SCHELL**

Promoted to **Section Chief of Palliative Care and Medical Ethics**.

**YAEL
SCHENKER**

Named **Associate Chief of Research for the Section of Palliative Care and Medical Ethics**. Appointed **Associate Director for Research Education, Training, and Career Development** at UPMC Hillman Cancer Center.

Research Collaborations



Access to
Palliative
Care



Patient
Decision-
Making



Clinician
Communication
Skills



Palliative
Care
Workforce



Pain and
Addiction in
Serious
Illness

Justin Yu and **Margaret Rosenzweig** developed a shared vision for PaRC community initiatives focused on empowering and supporting Black patients living with serious illness.



Sarah Belcher mentored Morehouse medical student and Gleitsman scholar **Chelsea Green** on a project about cancer-related financial hardship. Ms. Green presented this work at the 2023 AAHPM Annual Assembly.

Douglas White and **Yael Schenker**, co-lead an R01-funded trial of integrated specialty palliative care for older adults in the ICU. Multiple palliative care and critical care investigators are collaborating on this effort, including **Jennifer Seaman**, **Robert Arnold** and **Jane Schell**. This team also secured funding for a supplement to develop a technology-enhanced serious illness communication skills intervention for clinicians treating hospitalized patients with dementia.

Hailey Bulls, with mentors **Jessica Merlin** and **Yael Schenker**, led a K08-funded project to develop and pilot an intervention addressing the impact of opioid stigma in cancer pain.

2022 Annual Retreat

The 2022 PaRC Retreat was held October 13th, 2022 at the University of Pittsburgh, and brought together >80 attendees to present and discuss current palliative care research, as well as policy opportunities to advance palliative care.



Keynote speaker **Betty Ferrell, PhD, MSN, RN, CHPN, FAAN, FPCN**, is an internationally recognized pioneer in the field of palliative oncology nursing research. She has been in nursing for 44 years and focused her clinical and research expertise in pain management, quality of life, and palliative care.

Stream Dr. Ferrell's speech: ["A Program of Clinical Research in Palliative Care."](#)



Panel Discussion – “Policy Opportunities to Advance Palliative Care”

Panelists: Alison Beam, UPMC; Brynn Bowman, Center to Advance Palliative Care; Nancy Zionts, Jewish Healthcare Foundation; Steve Albert, University of Pittsburgh; Erika Fricke, Pennsylvania House Health Committee
Moderator: Robert Arnold, University of Pittsburgh, UPMC

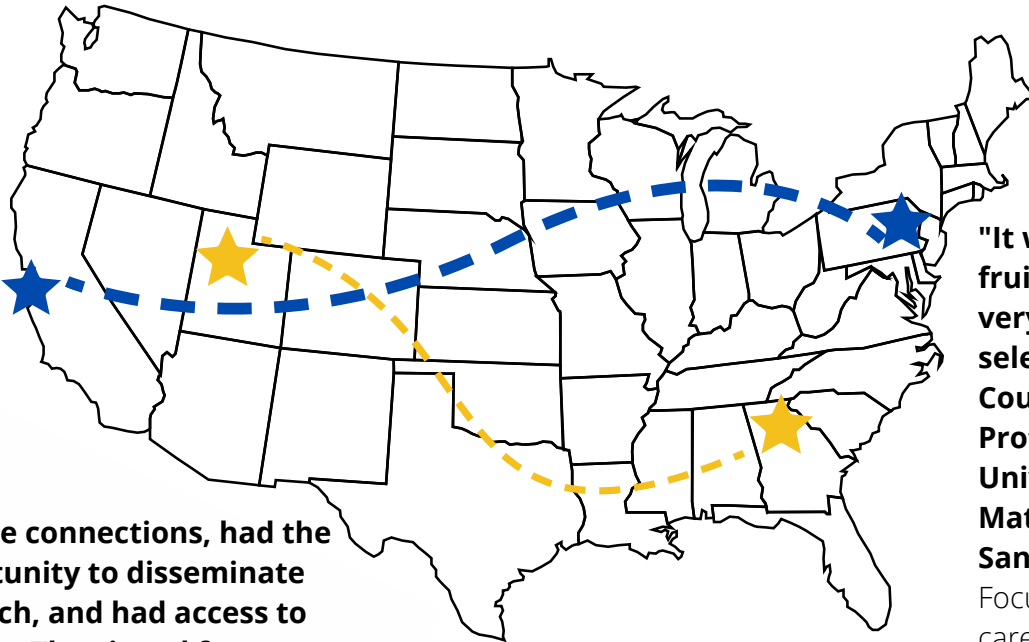


The 2022 PaRC Annual Retreat featured poster presentations by 29 PaRC mentees, clinicians, and researchers.

PaRC Special Programs

Junior Faculty Visiting Professor Program

This program aims to advance the careers of junior faculty palliative care researchers and create opportunities for cross-institutional collaborations. Early-career researchers (< 5 years in faculty position), from a range of disciplines, visit hosting institutions with robust palliative care research programs to share their work and make connections.



"I made connections, had the opportunity to disseminate research, and had access to experts. The virtual format was really convenient and allowed for meeting more people." - Tay Djin, PhD, RN, Assistant Professor, University of Utah
Match: Emory University

Focus Areas: Patient and caregiver shared decision making, health utilization, population data

"It was overall a wonderful and fruitful experience, and I'm very grateful to have been selected to participate!" - Kate Courtright, MD, MS, Assistant Professor of Medicine, University of Pennsylvania
Match: University of California, San Francisco

Focus Areas: palliative care, critical care, serious illness, clinical trials

Summary:

- 15 junior faculty have been matched to hosting institutions based on focus areas in palliative care, pain and symptom management, rehabilitation, geriatric cardiology, and care and policies for older adults living with neurodegenerative diseases.

PaRC Special Programs

The Gleitsman Student Diversity in Palliative Care Research Award

The Gleitsman Student Diversity in Palliative Care Research Award supports students from backgrounds underrepresented in medicine and/or from schools without a palliative care program to complete a mentored research project with University of Pittsburgh palliative care investigators. [Learn more.](#)

Meet the Scholars, 2022



Sandy Athenaise Durosier, MS, BA
A.T. Still University,
School of Osteopathic
Medicine in Arizona



Chelsea Green, MS, BA
Morehouse School
of Medicine



Adam Whitsett, BS
Morehouse School
of Medicine



Justin Woolridge, BS
Morehouse School
of Medicine

"The...program has had a large impact on my confidence as a medical student and a future physician. I joined a community of intelligent, caring, and innovative providers who care about Palliative Care and research and provide me with opportunities and resources to become better." - **Sandy Athenaise Durosier, MS, BA**

Mentee Spotlight



Ms. Green presents her project at the 2023 AAHPM Annual Assembly

Chelsea Green, Morehouse School of Medicine, received the Gleitsman award in 2022. Her project focused on **patient-provider communication and financial hardship in the context of serious illness.**

We asked Chelsea to share her experience with us and what surprised her about being a part of the 2022 Gleitsman program:

"The most surprising aspect of being a part of the program was learning how much palliative care is involved in all aspects of medicine and connects with many different specialties."

"Asking a simple question like 'what do you need?' can be comforting and impactful to the patient."

"During the program, I had the opportunity to travel to Pittsburgh and spend a day shadowing a palliative care physician. Through this experience, I learned that palliative care incorporates the patient's family, community members, and loved ones impacted by the patient's terminal illness treatment. As a compassionate individual, I was fascinated by how palliative care connected medicine and the human aspect of care....Rather than solely focusing your concerns on 'fixing' the patient, palliative care adds to the focus on what the patient deems important. I was amazed at the palliative care team's expertise and ease in building strong relationships and trust with their patients."

Research Mentor: Sarah Belcher, PhD, RN, OCN® **Career Mentor:** Kimberly Curseen, MD

PaRC Staff and Funders

PaRC Core Staff

Maria Belin, MLIS

Shane Belin, BS

Rachel Butler, MHA, MPH

Eric Chiu, BS

Yvette Dudley-Morrissey, MS

Roberta Flowers, MSN, RN

Julian Hall, BA

Carolyn Impagliazzo, BS

Ariel Leath, MA

Bridget Mayrer, BA

Erica Motter, MA

Sarah Orris, BS

Steve Orris, BS

Active Funders

ASCO Conquer Cancer - Rising Tide Foundation

Arthur Vining Davis Foundation

Duke University

Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development

Genentech Foundation

McElhattan Foundation

National Cancer Institute

National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute

National Institute of Mental Health

National Institute of Nursing Research

National Institute on Aging

National Institute on Drug Abuse

National Institutes of Health

Palliative Care Research Cooperative

The National Center for Advancing Translational Sciences

The National Center for Complementary and Integrative Medicine

The National Institutes of Health Office of Disease Prevention

University of Pittsburgh, Central Research Development Fund

University of Pittsburgh, Clinical and Translational Science Institute

University of Pittsburgh, Department of Medicine

University of Pittsburgh, HRSA NRSA T32 Pediatric Primary Care Research Training Program

University of Pittsburgh, KARAT Catalyst Grant

University of Pittsburgh, School of Nursing, Center for Research and Education, Pilot/Feasibility Study Program

University of Pittsburgh, School of Nursing, Women's Health Research Hub

University of Wisconsin

UPMC Hillman Cancer Center



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