

Newsletter

Department of Orthopaedic Surgery and Rehabilitation Medicine Division of Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation

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**Chief of Service & Residency Program Director
Division of Rehabilitation Medicine
Director, Interventional Pain Management
Course Director, Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation
Clerkship**



Greetings, I am pleased to be updating you all on the progress and accomplishments of our illustrious PM&R Program since our last newsletter. A new academic year is upon us, and with that comes a new batch of residents and medical

students eager to enter the field of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation. It gives me great joy in seeing not just the new faces entering the program, but the departing residents going onwards to fellowships, jobs, and the next stages of both their careers and lives.

The time we are afforded as educators to train our residents and students is short, so the division works diligently to provide the best educational and diverse training environment for all of our trainees. The skills, knowledge, and principles we seek to instill are carried forward with them for the rest of their careers. I often try to reflect on what my role in our trainees' growth is. They start with us full of youthful energy and ambition, but lacking the experience and self-confidence that comes with time. I liken my role to that of a parent teaching their child how to ride a bike; the skill and ability to ride has developed naturally within them, the only thing I am doing is keeping my hand on the seat until they find the confidence, balance, and momentum they need to stay upright on their own. The moment they reach their inner equilibrium, the whole world opens up in front of them. No longer are they confined to what they see immediately in front of them or to where I can take them; they are now able to travel on their own towards any destination they seek.

Over my many years in education I have learned that it is never easy to know exactly when to let go of that seat. Sometimes people crash, sometimes they blame you for letting go too early, sometimes they are mad that you keep ahold while running alongside. If you think back to that sense of fear you had the first time you looked back and saw no one was holding onto the seat anymore, imagine the feeling I get

knowing I can no longer guide and support you on your way to your next destination. I can only hope you took enough direction from me to navigate the rest of the way on your own. Eventually our trainees are all able to ride on their own, and I am proud to see the many diverse paths across fields, over mountains, and through valleys our trainees have ridden to their current destinations. Today there are Downstate PM&R Residency and COM alumni spread all over the U.S.A. and the world in roles as diverse as department chairs, world renowned educators, clinical care innovators, leading researchers, and even social media stars.

As the program continues to change and evolve so does both the medical center – now known as Downstate Health Sciences University – and the neighborhood around it. If some of our alumni were to visit today they would be in awe of the new facilities, educational opportunities, research innovations, and clinical developments at SUNY Downstate Health Sciences University. The neighborhood of Prospect Lefferts Gardens itself has been reinvigorated with new investments, developments, and social support. What was once an area to pass thru quickly on your way to and from work has become an area to spend a nice long summer day exploring or a place to live, put down roots, and grow a family in. SUNY Downstate Health Sciences University has made it their mission to work to be a leader in not just the neighborhood but beyond to all of Brooklyn; not just for health care, but also for health equity and change. Downstate provides thousands of free health screenings, physicals, and have over 100+ community projects sponsored annually. We are working diligently to train the next generation of doctors and public health leaders with a focus on health equity for all. I would like to give special recognition to Chantal Littrean for her work on the annual Community Healthy Lifestyle Fair.

I hope you are as excited about all of the changes, growth, updates, and accomplishments found in this newsletter that have been happening at SUNY Downstate PM&R as we are! We are proud of our program and hope you will take opportunities to collaborate with us for continued improvement.

Contact Info

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Want to Get Involved or Reconnect?

- Interested in acting as a **mentor or advisor** to Downstate PM&R residents or Downstate COM medical students?
- Interested in giving a **Grand Rounds or lecture** to the residency program (in-person and virtual options)?
- Interested in joining us for our **annual program dinners at the AAPM&R or AAP conferences** this academic year?
- **Looking for a job?** We are looking to hire full-time and part-time faculty for outpatient, inpatient, and sports faculty physiatry positions

Contact: Sanjeev.Agarwal@downstate.edu to learn more

Spotlight on a Training Site

The James J. Peters Bronx VA



Back in July 2020, the Downstate PM&R Residency Program gained two new rotation sites for residency training. PM&R residents now spend two months as PGY2's at the St. Alban's VA Medical Center in Queens and two months at the James J. Peter's VA Medical Center in the Bronx as PGY3's. We would like to shine a light on one of our new sites, The James J. Peter's Bronx VA, to our alumni and team members who may have never gotten the chances to spend time at the VA's. We would like to highlight the wonderful training opportunities and our newest clinical instructors who have dedicated themselves to resident learning.

The Bronx VA rotation consists of one Downstate PM&R PGY3 resident rotating in a month long block. The resident rotates alongside PM&R residents from other NYC area programs while working in both the inpatient and outpatient settings. Residents cover a 24 bed inpatient rehabilitation unit specializing in the acute rehab of spinal cord injuries and neuromuscular disorders, in addition to managing the acute rehab of SCI patients with strokes, fractures, cancer, chronic pain, and prosthetics/orthotics. In the outpatient setting they provide rehabilitation services for: spinal cord injuries annual physicals, wound care, ALS, multiple sclerosis, musculoskeletal, prosthetics, orthotics, EMG/NCS, ultrasound guided chemodenervation injections, spasticity management, and general rehab.

The Bronx VA rotation site has evolved into a favorite rotation site of many of our residents due to the unique learning opportunities of the SCI patients, the VA system, research opportunities, ability to collaborate with trainees from other programs, and the strong educational emphasis from the attending physicians. There is great appreciation for Dr. Kornfeld and his table talks that make complex learning materials easier to learn and retain.

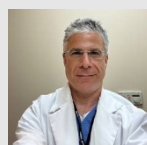
Dr. Marinella Galea

Dr. Marinella Galea is a graduate of the University of Milan Medical School, Italy. She is Board Certified in Internal Medicine and Spinal Cord Medicine. She has been practicing since 2000 in the Bronx, at the James J Peters VAMC

SCI Center. In 2017 she was appointed as the Chief of Spinal Cord Injury and Disorder.

Dr Galea specializes in the care and rehabilitation of highly disabled patients, and is interested in the medical consequences of disability. During her tenure, she has expanded the services offered by the SCI/D Center to include Veterans with Multiple Sclerosis (MS) and Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS). Under her leadership, the JJPVAMC has been selected as a Regional Multiple Sclerosis Center and has received recognition as an Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis Certified Treatment Center.

Dr. Galea is an associate professor of PM&R at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai and assistant professor of Medicine at New York Medical College. She has published in several peer reviewed journals on cardiovascular, endocrine, infectious issues associated with spinal cord injury, amyotrophic lateral sclerosis and on the use of telemedicine as an effective tool to monitor, treat and follow up individuals with disability. Her work has proven particularly helpful during the recent COVID-19 pandemic to guide and support virtual care programs aimed at proving rehabilitation to individuals in their home environment. Dr Galea has been invited to present at national and international conferences. She has received funding from the VA Office of Rehabilitation Research & Development.

Dr. Stephen D. Kornfeld

Dr. Stephen Kornfeld is an Attending Spinal Cord Injury Physician at James J. Peters VA Medical Center with board certification in Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation. He acts as Assistant Professor in the Department of Rehabilitation and Human

Performance at Icahn School of Medicine at Mt. Sinai and the Department of Rehabilitation and Regenerative Medicine at Columbia University. With a passion for teaching, Dr. Kornfeld operates as the Director of SCI Education for SCI Fellows, PM&R Residents, and Medical Students at the Bronx VA. He continues to express his love for teaching by organizing daily lectures to educate rotating physicians. He is a firm believer that a strong, interdisciplinary approach to spinal cord rehabilitation is needed in order to achieve functional ambulation in his patients.

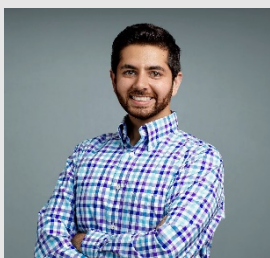
Dr. Kornfeld finished his residency at Mt. Sinai Hospital and began working as a rehabilitation physician at Lutheran hospital where he worked with orthopedic and neurology rehabilitation inpatients. He continues to express his love for teaching by acting as a mentor for the SCI Fellows and residents performing their Spinal Cord Injury Rotations at the Bronx VA. He has published in several peer reviewed journals and has an interest in exoskeletal devices for management of rehabilitation following spinal cord injury.

Alumni Spotlight



Bram Newman, M.D. (Class of 2019) completed his fellowship training in Sports Medicine at Maine Medical Center in 2020 and joined Maine Medical Partners Neurosurgery and Spine as a musculoskeletal physiatrist. His clinical focus is in general musculoskeletal medicine including the treatment of spine,

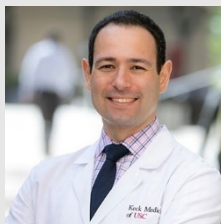
joint, and nerve related conditions with use of diagnostic musculoskeletal ultrasound and ultrasound guided injections. He remains involved with the Sports Medicine fellowship as clinical faculty and was appointed as Clinical Assistant Professor at Tufts University School of Medicine where he started a PM&R rotation for Maine Track students. Dr. Newman is involved in community sports coverage as a team physician for the Portland Boxing Club, Maine Mariners ECHL hockey, and local high schools and colleges. Dr. Newman and his family are very much enjoying all that Maine has to offer spending their free time running, hiking, and skiing.



Arpit Arora, M.D. (Class of 2017) is a palliative medicine physician at the Samuel Oschin Cancer Center at Cedars-Sinai in Los Angeles. He completed his medical education and intern year at Rutgers New Jersey Medical School, his residency in Physical Medicine &

Rehabilitation at SUNY Downstate Medical Center, and then a fellowship in Hospice and Palliative Medicine at NYU Langone Health, where he remained as faculty before moving to LA.

His aim is to help maximize quality of life by providing pain and symptom management, often alongside cancer directed therapies, and aiding in conversations about advance care planning and medical decision-making. He has held several local and national academic and administrative leadership roles and enjoys his work in the med-ed setting, with particular interests in teaching communication skills, medical improv, and health equity. A former NYC tour guide, he's excited to spend time on the West Coast and explore all that LA and SoCal have to offer.



Gene Tekmyster, D.O. (Class of 2012), believes that the goal of treatment should be optimization and return of pre-injury function. Dr. Tekmyster is double board certified in physical medicine and rehabilitation and in sports medicine. As a physical medicine

and rehabilitation physician (physiatrist), his focus remains on decreasing pain and working with his patients to allow them to resume their activities. As each person is unique, patients can be confident an individualized treatment plan will be presented and implemented. His specialties include advanced interventional spine care, regenerative treatments and sports medicine.

In demand as a speaker nationally and internationally, Dr. Tekmyster has widely published and presented on spine and sports medicine topics. He is at the forefront of spine research with an interest in regenerative therapeutics to treat chronic low back pain. In the time he has been a part of Keck Medicine of USC he has brought in new technologies to treat chronic low back pain and spinal stenosis.

Dr. Tekmyster is a physician consultant for the Los Angeles Kings professional hockey team and USC Trojans Athletic Medicine and team physician for the U.S. Ski & Snowboard teams.

He enjoys outdoor activities, especially cycling and hiking with his family. He also is an avid weightlifter and holds weightlifting and strength training coaching certifications."

Farewell Chantal Littrean



Greetings everyone, it is with great appreciation we are writing to announce the departure of Chantal Littrean from the position of SUNY Downstate PM&R Residency Program Coordinator. Chantal first took on this wonderful role back in 2003, and has helped oversee twenty residency classes graduate from our program. She has been a valuable asset to our department and has helped us deliver superior training and education to our residents. She has done a wonderful job of helping the residents, students, interviewees, and faculty reach and exceed their goals and objectives. For many of our alumni she has remained their constant point of contact for over two decades now. She was always a source of support for so many of us on the arduous journey of professional and personal growth that residency entails. Chantal leaves an indelible mark on the program having helped steady and shape it through over two decades of development and change. She is moving onwards and upwards to the position of SUNY Downstate Internal Medicine Residency Program Administrator (Good luck calculating those FeNa's 😊), where she will support over 200 residents a year. For nearly all of our current and past residents Chantal has been the first person from Downstate they communicate with and meet when they apply for residency here. I often hear from both residents and interviewees how pleasant she is and how she makes their experiences much easier than at other institutes. I have experienced this as well on a personal level.

I still remember my in-person interview at Downstate in 2014. When I stepped off the Winthrop Subway stop on that cold December day it was actually the first time I had ever set foot in Brooklyn. After walking over to Downstate Hospital from the subway, Chantal was there to greet me and she was the friendly face of reassurance and calm that I needed that morning. She made that day a success and her positive attitude coupled with a willingness to go above and beyond in her role drew me and I am sure many others to be a part of the training program. I would like to offer her the sincere gratitude and appreciation of the entire Department of Orthopaedic Surgery and Rehabilitation, its leadership, staff, and alumni.

- Haris Choudry, MD, MPH | Associate Residency Program Director

Welcome Lawrence Chan, D.O.



It is my honor to welcome Lawrence Andrew L. Chan, D.O. as the newest attending physician at the SUNY Downstate HSU Division of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation. Dr. Chan is well known to many of the residents, attendings, and alumni as he is a recent graduate of our SUNY Downstate PM&R residency program in 2022. He is a graduate from Rowan

University School of Osteopathic Medicine in New Jersey.

Dr. Chan possesses a keen interest in osteopathic manipulative medicine and empowering patients in their path towards functional restoration. He is a certified acupuncturist and along with osteopathic manipulation hopes to incorporate these complementary modalities to our outpatient clinic. Dr. Chan believes strongly in making sure every patient feels heard, understood, and well cared for. He emphasizes with our residents the need for empathetic and compassionate delivery of care. He is working as an attending on the inpatient rehab unit, consults service, and outpatient clinic.

- Sanjeev Agarwal, MD | Chief of Service PM&R

Welcome Debra Owens



First, I wish to convey our profound gratitude to Ms. Chantal Littrean for her steadfast dedication and service, as she embarks on a new chapter in her career.

In light of Ms. Littrean's transition, we are extremely fortunate to welcome Ms. Debra Owens, M.Ed., C-TAGME, as our new Interim Residency Coordinator. Ms. Owens brings a

wealth of experience and expertise to this role, which we believe will greatly benefit our residency program and, by extension, all of you. Her qualifications, including her M.Ed. and C-TAGME credentials, are a testament to her dedication to medical education and her commitment to ensuring the success of resident physicians.

Additionally, we are pleased to inform you that Ms. Owens will continue her role as the Fellowship Coordinator for Sports Medicine. This dual role demonstrates her dedication to both our residency and fellowship programs, which we believe will enhance the synergy between the two.

Please join us in welcoming Ms. Owens to our team. We are excited about the future and the positive impact she will undoubtedly have on our residency program.

- Sanjeev Agarwal, MD | Residency Program Director

SUNY Downstate PM&R's Newest PGY2 Residents – The Graduating Class of 2026



Swati Anand, MBBS

Hometown: Massapequa Park, NY

Medical School: Byramjee Jeejeebhoy Medical College, Ahmedabad, India

Why Downstate: Diverse patient population, research opportunities, supportive faculty, can stay close to my family.



Nikita Desai, D.O.

Hometown: Old Bridge, NJ

Medical School: Lake Erie College of Osteopathic Medicine, Erie, PA

Why Downstate: SUNY Downstate offers strong clinical training, diversity in patient population and exposure to procedural skills which is important to me.



Arool Iqbal, D.O.

Hometown: Paramus, NJ

Medical School: Lake Erie College of Osteopathic Medicine, Erie, PA

Why Downstate: I chose Downstate because of the supportive faculty and comradery among the residents. Also, the diverse patient population to learn from and the multiple research opportunities provided to accomplish my goals in PM&R.



Isha Rao, D.O.

Hometown: Bucks County, PA

Medical School: New York Institute of Technology College of Osteopathic Medicine, Old Westbury, NY

Why Downstate: Experience the city, diverse patient populations, get to see various pathologies



Kody Sumida, D.O.

Hometown: Honolulu, HI

Medical School: Touro University Nevada, Henderson, NV

Why Downstate: Great program with lots of resources and friendly residents. Also in New York!



Rebecca Takele, D.O.

Hometown: Annandale, VA

Medical School: Edward VIA College of Osteopathic Medicine (VCOM), Blacksburg, VA

Why Downstate: Here there is an opportunity to treat and learn from a diverse patient population not seen at many other residencies. I was also drawn to the reputation of this PM&R program, the supportive faculty, the strong clinical training I would receive, the opportunities to make the most of my residency, the success of past residents, and the emphasis on the wellness of residents.

Residency Classes Over The Years



Produced in cooperation with the Office of Development & Philanthropy

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