



UCSF Department of Medicine ZUCKERBERG SAN FRANCISCO GENERAL

CARING FOR PATIENTS AND PROVIDERS

Patient-Centered Cancer Care

A cancer diagnosis is difficult for any patient, but for those already struggling with obstacles like homelessness, immigration issues, or limited English proficiency, it can be overwhelming.

“Some of our patients face so many challenges that cancer is the least of their worries,” said Gabriela Quezada-Pérez, program coordinator for the ZSFG Cancer Awareness, Resources, and Education (CARE) program. “If you don’t know the system or speak the language, how do you know what to do?”

Part of the answer is CARE, a joint program of UCSF Division of Hematology and Oncology and the San Francisco Department of Public Health (SFDPH) offered by the ZSFG Community Wellness Center. Founded in 2002, CARE provides health education, resources, and a welcoming community to any SFDPH patient living with cancer. It is open to people of any gender and cancer type, at any stage of illness or survivorship.

The program offers groups in English, Spanish, and Cantonese, which meet two hours a week for nine weeks. The content varies based on participant feedback, but can include presentations on symptom management, the latest cancer treatments, and alternative therapies such as acupuncture. CARE also offers sessions on life skills like healthy eating and self-defense. Additionally, it introduces other resources, such as the Community Wellness Center’s bilingual yoga classes and organizations that offer low-cost massage.

CARE provides information and emotional support to patients and their caregivers. “Sometimes there are tears, but there’s also an incredible amount of love,” said Sofia Sojourner Newton,



Sofia Sojourner Newton, MPH, Manager, and Gabriela Quezada-Pérez, Program Coordinator, of CARE

MPH, Manager of the CARE program. “We often call each other the CARE family.” Some participants are isolated in single room occupancy hotels, and weekly meetings provide social interactions.

At each session, participants enjoy a warm meal donated by a local caterer, and can receive bus tokens or taxi vouchers. Drop-ins are welcome, and some participants continue attending for years because of the sense of community. The groups come together for a holiday party as well as field trips to places like the San Francisco Zoo. “There’s a hidden teaching moment, because if they venture out, that means they are exercising, which helps them with their cancer survivorship and overall well-being,” said Ms. Quezada-Pérez.

She and Ms. Newton coordinate a roster of faculty, staff, and volunteer presenters, and provide a safe environment that builds trust. “So many studies show that treatment is more effective when you feel supported and have a community,”

said Ms. Newton. “The modern medical system often doesn’t address psychosocial needs, which affects everything – pain management, treatment, medication compliance. At CARE, they have the freedom to talk in the circle about what’s going on with them, and the camaraderie is amazing.”

“CARE is another strand in the safety net for cancer patients,” said Terence Friedlander, MD, Chief of the ZSFG Division of Hematology/Oncology. “This is the only opportunity for patients to meet each other and forge relationships, and there’s a lot to be said for how they learn from each other. They share information about how to deal with side effects of drugs. They have the opportunity to ask lots of questions, which they might not be able to do during a 20-minute visit to their doctor. Also, some of the topics address things that might not occur to an oncologist, like spirituality, healing with laughter, and dental care.”

The program also allows presenters to tackle

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complex topics in depth. “I recently gave a talk at CARE about cancer immunotherapy, and it’s nice to be able to show slides with a lot of pictures, because some of our patients have limited literacy,” said Dr. Friedlander. “Also, having sessions in their language makes a big difference.”

Each year, between 100 and 350 patients attend at least one CARE session, and Dr. Friedlander hopes those numbers will increase. While he and his oncology colleagues refer patients to the program, he hopes to get the word out among internists, palliative care physicians, and surgeons. Through participant surveys, the CARE team found that the program enhanced medical understanding, improved communication with medical professionals, reduced cancer stigma, and provided outreach to men with cancer, among other benefits.

Ms. Quezada-Pérez is inspired by the dedication of her colleagues and the strength of the participants. “We learn resilience and how to be fierce from these patients,” she said. “At the holiday gathering, there’s music and dancing, and you’d never guess they had cancer. They live life to the fullest.”

Caring for the Doctor: The Nocturnists

“There are a lot of expectations in medicine that we are these robotic, all-knowing creatures who don’t need sleep, have perfect moral compasses, and never get sick ourselves,” said Emily Silverman, MD, Assistant Professor in the ZSFG Division of Hospital Medicine. “None of that is true. Talking about that is really important for shifting the culture.”



Emily Silverman, MD, *The Nocturnist* founder
To advance that conversation, Dr. Silverman

founded *The Nocturnists*, a series of live storytelling events and podcast. The stories, filled with compassion and sometimes humor, feature health care professionals grappling with thorny issues such as medical errors, experiences with depression, and frustration with patients who are unable to follow a care plan. “We hope to humanize physicians and health workers with these stories, creating the sense that vulnerability is okay, and acknowledging that the people providing health care are humans with doubts and flaws,” she said.

Throughout her childhood and into medical school, Dr. Silverman pursued twin loves of science and the arts. Creativity, however, hit a brick wall with her all-consuming schedule as an internal medicine resident at UCSF. “When intern year ended, I felt really famished to reconnect with that side of myself,” said Dr. Silverman.

She was unsure where the muse would lead her until she attended a taping of *The Moth*, a live storytelling event that is carried as a podcast and public radio show. “There was a unique rawness, connection, and magic to it, because everyone is together in a room,” said Dr. Silverman. “I decided I wanted to create *The Moth* for health care.”

She spent her days off driving around town, scouting out small theaters, and produced her first storytelling evening at the Shelton Theater near Union Square in January 2016. “It was really important for this activity to take place in beautiful, artistic places away from the sterile clinical environment,” said Dr. Silverman. “We did three or four shows with minimal publicity, and started selling out [the theater.] I’d identified this hunger in the health care community to engage in our work in a more artistic and narrative way.”

Narrators are selected through an application process, and work with a story coach to prepare. All stories are vetted to ensure privacy law compliance with privacy laws. The show is open to any health care professional, and has included faculty, trainees, and staff from ZSFG and other institutions. *The Nocturnists* events have graduated to larger theaters in San Francisco, and Dr. Silverman and her team have also produced shows in New York and Boston. The stories form the basis of a podcast, which also includes in-depth interviews with the storytellers.

SPOTLIGHT

Neal Benowitz, MD, Professor Emeritus in the Division of Cardiology, was identified by *PLOS Biology* publication as one of the top 0.01% among 7 million scientists based on scientific impact.

Katherine Lupton, MD, Associate Professor in the Division of General Internal Medicine, will be honored in September as a new member of the UCSF Academy of Medical Educators.

Payam Nahid, MD, Professor in the Division of Pulmonary and Critical Care, has been appointed Associate Director, Clinical Trials Operations in the UCSF Office of Clinical Research, and Director of the Trial Innovation Network program in the Clinical and Translational Science Institute that supports and enables multicenter clinical trials at UCSF.

Hilary Seligman, MD, Associate Professor in the Division of General Internal Medicine, was named the new Director of the National Clinician Scholars Program (NCSF) at UCSF. The NCSF focuses on training scholars in health equity, health systems, and community engagement. Applications are being accepted for the first cohort to begin in July 2020.

“Nocturnists” refers to physicians who work exclusively at night, and is a nod to the evening scheduling of the events. “There’s an element of secrets and mystery, as we gather together at night to pull back the curtain and shine a light on the shadows,” said Dr. Silverman.

She hopes to use storytelling to create a community of healing. “There’s a lot written about the epidemic of burnout, depression, and even suicidality in physicians,” said Dr. Silverman. “A lot of people are crushed by the moral distress of coming into medicine wanting to help people but coming up against all these barriers – like spending half your day sitting at a computer rather than being at the bedside, or dealing with the business-ization of health care and the expectations that we do more in less and less time. It’s cathartic to have those challenges validated by your community, and to realize that you’re not alone.”

Dr. Silverman looks forward to storytelling events this fall, as well as producing the third season of the podcast. She encourages anyone with a story idea specific to ZSFG to reach out to her. “Academic medicine is so fragmented, and so much of our social life has moved onto our phones,” said Dr. Silverman. “There is something about face-to-face contact that draws people in a way that sitting at home watching Netflix doesn’t. It’s the magic of live theater, and I think that’s healing.”

The Nocturnists next event is Friday, Oct. 18 at Gray Area/Grand Theater in the Mission District. To listen to the podcast or pitch a story idea, visit www.thenocturnists.com.

Elizabeth Chur

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