



FIGHTING PARKINSON'S

And Changing Lives



REHABILITATION
2023
YEAR IN REVIEW



Hackensack
Meridian *Health*

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MESSAGE FROM OUR CHAIR

I'm pleased to share this 2024 Hackensack Meridian JFK Johnson Rehabilitation Institute magazine, which focuses on Parkinson's disease and the dedicated physicians, nurses and therapists working to help our patients live their best lives. We provide a range of treatments that have been shown to alleviate symptoms and improve overall function in patients with Parkinson's disease.

We're especially proud of our innovative two-week, in-patient Parkinson's Wellness Program, the only one in the nation that is run by physical medicine and rehabilitation physicians. We are the specialists who have the expertise in rehabilitation medicine, and we work seamlessly with specialty neurologists and neurosurgeons at the Hackensack Meridian Neuroscience Institute at JFK University Medical Center. Data from the Parkinson's Wellness Program, (we refer to it as a "boot camp"), is impressive, and we will continue to document and share our outcomes in research studies.

You can also read updates to the on-going JFK Johnson Stroke-Heart™ Trials. The research is showing that medically supervised cardiac conditioning, prescribed therapy and physician follow-up significantly improve mortality, cardiac performance and overall function. Our goal is nothing less than to change the future of stroke rehabilitation in America.

I'm also proud to share that we have been recognized by *U.S. News & World Report* as one of the nation's best rehabilitation hospitals five years in a row. Our residency program this year has again received a five star rating on the nationally known Doximity Residency Navigator. Our faculty has grown 400 percent in the past ten years, and our overall patient satisfaction rate is 96 percent.

Next year we celebrate 50 years of serving our community and patients — while also advancing the field of rehabilitation medicine through research and innovation.

Yours in good health,

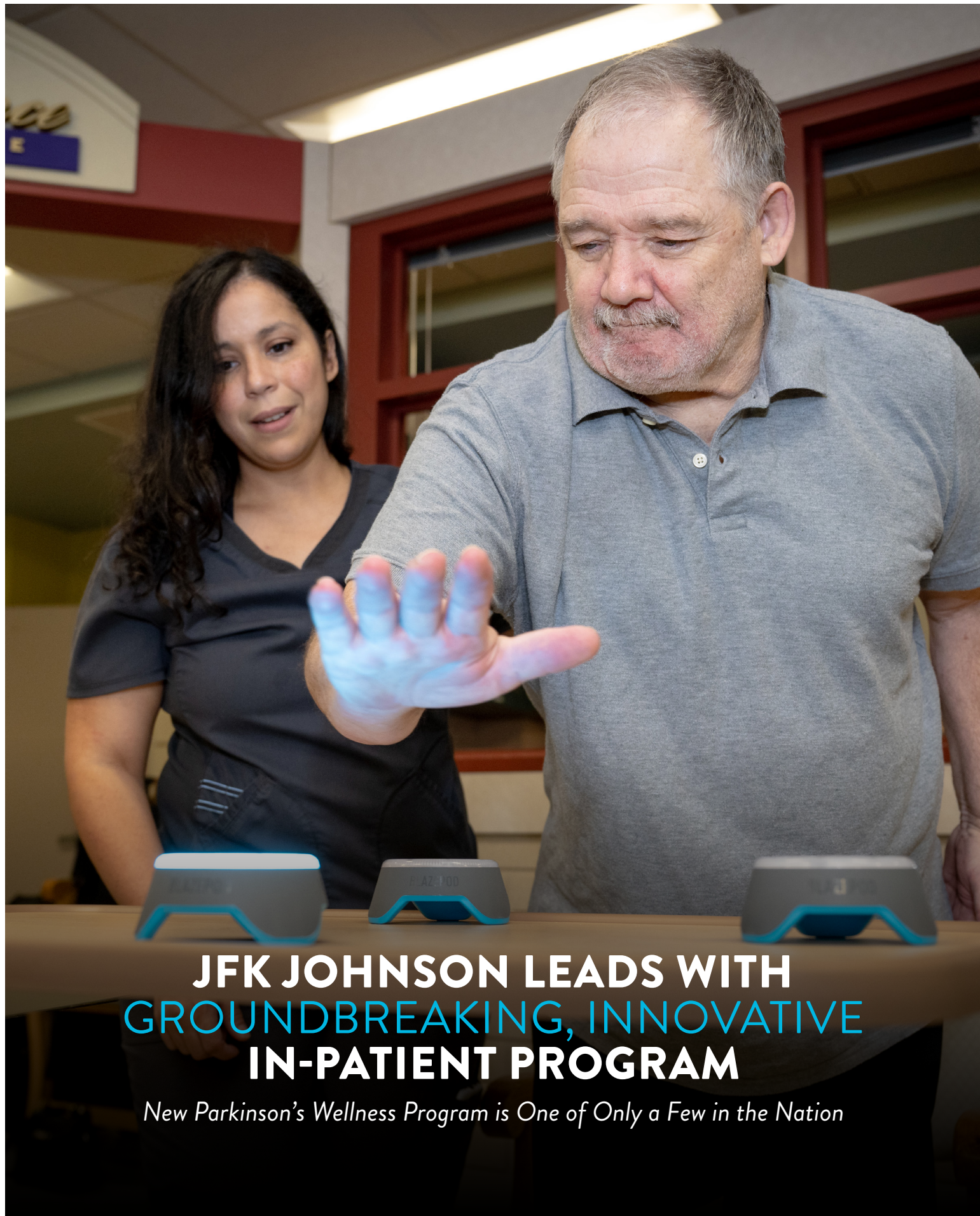
Sara Cuccurullo M.D.

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Hackensack Meridian
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JFK JOHNSON LEADS WITH GROUNDBREAKING, INNOVATIVE IN-PATIENT PROGRAM

New Parkinson's Wellness Program is One of Only a Few in the Nation

After living with Parkinson's for 26 years, Peter Buckley's balance began to falter and he fell repeatedly. He feared the next fall could cause serious injury. The Clark, New Jersey, man also noticed his speech declining.

Buckley made the decision to enroll in the JFK Johnson Rehabilitation Institute Parkinson's Wellness Program, a two-week, in-patient "boot camp" that helps people maintain and restore their ability to function. It's the only inpatient Parkinson's wellness program in the nation that's run by physical medicine and rehabilitation physicians.

A specialized medical team led by Steven Markos, M.D., a Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation physician, created a specific plan for Buckley. The Parkinson's Wellness team includes Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation physicians, neurologists, neurosurgeons, rehab nurses, physical, occupational and recreation therapists, speech language pathologists, social workers, rehabilitation psychologists, dietitians, pharmacists and exercise physiologists who work together to enable patients with Parkinson's to improve their ability to function.

Buckley participated in a breadth of intense therapies and activities — all provided by skilled therapists with credentials and experience in Parkinson's disease and other movement disorders. A neurologist specializing in Movement Disorders from the Hackensack Meridian Neuroscience Institute at JFK University Medical Center optimized Buckley's medications.

Today, Buckley, a 65-year-old former corrections officer with two children, says his balance and overall wellbeing has improved significantly.

"I'm doing so much better than before," he says. His wife Anna Buckley noticed meaningful improvement in her husband. "The speech therapy was great," she says. "And I think everything in the program also helped his attitude. He just feels better overall. Having the program in-patient was better than going back and forth. Everything was in one place."

Therapists with credentials and experience in Parkinson's disease guide Peter Buckley through exercises shown to reduce symptoms and improve overall function.

Research shows improvements

Preliminary research of the first 25 patients shows the program significantly helps patients with Parkinson's disease or other movement disorders.

"We're seeing tremendous improvements from both a medical and functional standpoint," Dr. Markos says. "We're increasing a patient's level of independence and endurance."

For instance, Dr. Markos said some people with Parkinson's can be greatly troubled by postural hypotension, or a sudden drop in blood pressure when standing or changing position. The Parkinson's Wellness Program can address this complication, if necessary.

"We've seen patients progress from passing out nearly every day to walking without issues," Dr. Markos says.

Sara Cuccurullo, M.D., Medical Director of the JFK Johnson Rehabilitation Institute, says the program is for patients who have experienced an increase in symptoms or other progression of the disease or setback. The program focuses on patients who are not acutely ill or severely disabled, but who struggle greatly at home with the symptoms and lifestyle changes that Parkinson's disease brings. Patients must be able to tolerate three hours of therapy each day.

"We say, 'Instead of waiting until you have a bad fall, let's get you in this program.' We optimize our patients' medicine."



We get them in physical and occupational therapies, and they go home stronger and better able to function,” Dr. Cuccurullo said.

Although every patient is different, Dr. Markos said most who complete the program improve walking distance and stability, reduce freezing, strengthen stair climbing, gain speaking volume and improve overall independence. For some, the improvement has been profound. Markos credits the quality and quantity of therapy, conducted by experienced physical, occupational and speech therapists specializing in Parkinson’s.

Supporting patients in the community

The goal is to work with patients in the community and to identify those patients who are struggling and declining in function. They may need medication revamping and intense therapies to improve speech and swallowing, cognition, gait and balance and core stability and to reduce tremors and falls.

“It’s about improving quality of life for every patient,” Dr. Cuccurullo says.

The program also addresses problems such as insomnia, apathy and depression that can occur as part of the

The Parkinson’s Wellness Program brings together movement disorder specialists in physical medicine and rehabilitation, neurology and neurosurgery to evaluate all areas of care for patients living with Parkinson’s disease. From left to right, Roger P. Rossi, D.O., Medical Director of the Parkinson’s Disease Program at JFK Johnson; Anton Svetlanov, D.O., neurologist and specialist in movement disorders at the Hackensack Meridian Neuroscience Institute at JFK University Medical Center; Stephen Bloomfield, M.D., stereotactic and functional neurosurgeon at the Neuroscience Institute at JFK University Medical Center; Philip Hanna, director of the Parkinson’s Disease and Movement Disorders Center at the Neuroscience Institute at JFK University Medical Center; and Steven Markos, M.D., a physical medicine and rehabilitation physician at JFK Johnson.



disease. Roger P. Rossi, D.O., Medical Director of the Parkinson's Disease Program at JFK Johnson, said the synergy of all disciplines working together drives the benefits of the program.

"We want to be proactive," Rossi said. "Our patients leave the two-week program with a detailed strategy to maintain the benefits they achieved."


The session with the pharmacist or the dietician can be done with family members present so they understand more about what the patient is experiencing and how family members can help. Patients and their families learn when and how to take their medications and how timing of meals can impact the effectiveness of medications.

"The availability of our resources to the patients and families is invaluable. We receive such positive feedback about the whole team," said Janice Dibling, MS, CCC/SLP, Manager of Acute and Inpatient Rehabilitation Speech Pathology and Clinical Coordinator of the Parkinson's Wellness Program.

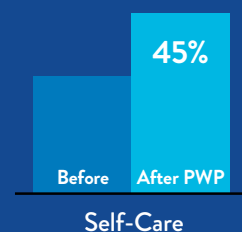
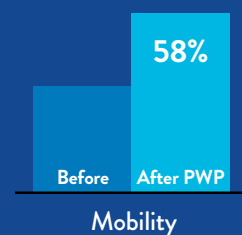
The affiliation with the Hackensack Meridian Neuroscience Institute at JFK University Medical Center means neurologists who are sub-specialists with fellowship training in movement disorders can meet regularly with patients during the two-week program.

"We can assess a baseline and then make medication adjustments as we follow the patient multiple times each week. Because they are in-patient, you can follow them very closely as you work to optimize their medications," said Philip A. Hanna, M.D., FAAN, director of the Parkinson's Disease and Movement Disorders Center at the JFK Neuroscience Institute. Dr. Hanna said the Neuroscience Institute includes three neurologists with subspecialty training in movement disorders.

John Kolaya is among those patients who benefited from the two-week program. For Kolaya, a retired civil engineer who lives in Lavallette, the program reduced some of his Parkinson's symptoms overall. Kolaya already regularly attended outpatient therapies as well as activities such as ParkinSINGS. Still, he found the two-week "boot camp" and the convergence and intensity of the therapies and medical support to advance his quality of life.

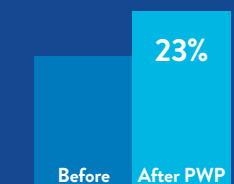
"The boot camp is intense and very focused. You leave feeling strong and steadier," Kolaya said. "It's so valuable." 

Individuals with Parkinson's disease who completed the intensive Parkinson's Wellness Program significantly improved their ability to move and improved self-care tasks



Measured by GG scores. Standardized Assessment tool of Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) for functional abilities

Individuals with Parkinson's disease who participated in the intensive Parkinson's Wellness Program also significantly improved their vocal function



Measured by percent change in Voice Handicap Index (VHI). A measure of vocal function and impact on an individual's quality of life.

ADVANCING CARE AND IMPROVING OUTCOMES FOR PEOPLE WITH PARKINSON'S

Continuum of Care All Under One Roof

JFK Johnson is advancing what's possible for people with Parkinson's disease through a range of therapies medically proven to reduce symptoms and improve overall function. The nationally recognized rehabilitation institute provides the most up-to-date and innovative therapies all provided by physicians board certified in Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, and experienced and certified therapists and nurses.

"There is strong and continually mounting research showing that exercise and rehabilitation can treat symptoms and improve overall function," says Roger Rossi, D.O., the director of the Parkinson's Disease and Movement Disorders Program at JFK Johnson Rehabilitation Institute.



Aurora Rodriguez with Lauren Karpinski, Health and Fitness manager.

Understanding the neuro-protective effects of exercise is especially critical now that biomarkers and other tests can diagnose Parkinson's years before the classic motor symptoms, such as tremors and rigidity, appear, Dr. Rossi says.

"Through rehabilitation, we have patients who reduce their medications as well as improve their symptoms," Dr. Rossi says. He cited recent studies showing that intense exercise has been shown to alter the abnormal accumulation of a protein in the brain called Alpha-synuclein, thought to contribute to Parkinson's.

Seamless coordination among therapy, medications, surgery

Parkinson's disease is a neurologic disorder that occurs when nerve cells that control movement become impaired or die. The disease can cause uncontrollable movements as well as shaking, stiffness and difficulty with balance and coordination — and other symptoms such as fatigue and abnormal blood pressure.

At JFK Johnson, interdisciplinary teams provide intense rehabilitation focused on the various Parkinson's symptoms. Steven Markos, M.D., a Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation physician, works with Dr. Rossi to provide rehabilitation strategies that address the specific needs and symptoms of each patient.

"We work to be proactive and begin helping our Parkinson's patients as soon as possible instead of just reacting when there is a problem," Dr. Markos says. "The high level of the rehabilitation we provide — different therapies working in synergy — is what makes an enormous difference in outcomes for our patients."

The physicians say patients and even some in the medical community are not fully aware of the value and availability of rehabilitation for people with Parkinson's and other movement disorders.

"There is a lack of understanding of the role of rehabilitation medicine," says Dr. Cuccurullo, Medical Director and Vice

President of JFK Johnson Rehabilitation Institute. "And what we offer is not available everywhere in the country. We are lucky to have these interventions here."

Goals of therapy

The JFK Johnson physicians supervise rehabilitation and treatment for patients at all points of the disease. They start with an evaluation of each person. Are they falling? Are they having trouble communicating? Are they having freezing episodes? Or perhaps they were recently diagnosed. An individual plan is created for each person that could include speech, occupational or physical therapies.

JFK Johnson's affiliation with the Hackensack Meridian Neuroscience Institute at JFK University Medical Center allows a continuum of care that includes access to the latest interventions, such as Deep Brain Stimulation. In this procedure, neurosurgeons implant electrodes that produce electrical impulses that regulate abnormal impulses. JFK Neuroscience Institute also provides access to MRI-guided laser therapy and high-intensity focused ultrasound as well as treatment from experienced neurologists with subspecialties in movement disorders.

Therapy is part of the strategy even for patients who undergo cutting-edge surgeries.

At JFK Johnson, experienced therapists work to motivate patients to continue therapies and activities during supervised therapies and at home.

"We understand that decreased initiation can be a symptom of the disease," said Janice Dibling, MS, CCC/SLP, Manager of Acute and Inpatient Rehabilitation Speech Pathology and Clinical Coordinator of the Parkinson's Wellness Program. "That's why we work to educate and motivate our patients to stay involved with their therapy and activities. We tell them, 'Use your skills to maintain them.'" 🧩

“

The physical therapy has been great. My neurologist said in some ways I have actually improved since I started. And the boxing... It's not just boxing. It makes you think and really concentrate. And everyone is so positive. It's a great experience and I really look forward to it."

WALTER RITZER of Colonia. He was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease two years ago. RITZER is featured on the magazine cover.

RANGE OF THERAPIES AND SUPPORTIVE SERVICES FOR PARKINSON'S OUTLINED

JFK Johnson Rehabilitation Institute provides a range of therapies and supportive services for people with Parkinson's disease and other movement disorders.

Physical Therapy: Physical therapists help patients increase mobility, strength and balance. A specific type of therapy, called LSVT BIG, amplifies each movement with bigger steps and bolder movements to reduce the progression of hypokinesia, the increasingly smaller, more shuffling movements that can happen in people with Parkinson's. All therapies are by LSVT-certified occupational or physical therapists.

Occupational Therapy: Occupational therapists help patients learn how to best perform activities of daily living, whether brushing their teeth, handwriting or shopping for groceries. Parkinson's patients learn strategies to perform tasks and compensatory strategies when necessary. They also address driving, adaptive equipment options and resuming their roles at home.

Speech Therapy: Speech language pathologists work to help patients speak with greater volume so they can be better understood. They are certified in LSVT LOUD and SPEAK OUT! Both are methods that help patients to strengthen their respiratory function and muscles of speech and swallowing. Any swallowing deficits that may be present are diagnosed and treated to avoid aspiration. Therapists also address cognitive deficits such as memory and recall, increasing independence.

ACTIVITIES:

ParkinSINGS Choir. JFK Johnson Rehabilitation Institute and the Parkinson's Foundation have collaborated to provide people with Parkinson's a way to exercise voice, speech and swallowing muscles through singing. The choir enables members to maintain their intelligibility while having fun.

SPEAK OUT! A speech therapy program that places emphasis on speaking with intent. With specially trained speech language pathologists, patients complete speech, voice and cognition exercises.

THE LOUD CROWD is a weekly group program for graduates of SPEAK OUT! who work with speech language pathologists on exercises in a group setting.

Rock Steady Boxing® is a fitness curriculum that uses non-contact boxing to improve strength and endurance and to empower people with Parkinson's to "fight back." It is known to improve strength and balance.

LSVT Big is an exercise protocol that teaches people how to use bigger movements automatically in daily living.

LSVT LOUD is a speech therapy program focusing on increasing vocal loudness to improve intelligibility.

ParkinSings is led by choir director and speech language pathologist Alyson Chananie.





Pat Dunstan, right, with Lauren Karpinski, Health and Fitness Manager.

AFTER PARKINSON'S DIAGNOSIS, THERAPY HELPS PATIENT REGAIN CONFIDENCE AND JOY

Pat Dunstan recalls staring at her refrigerator and failing to find the word for the large appliance.

At the time, she noticed she was feeling increasingly tired, and her handwriting had begun deteriorating. At her job, where the nurse and lawyer worked in litigation management, she struggled to keep up with complex conversations.

"Sometimes I suddenly didn't know what people were talking about," she recalls. Then she noticed a slight tremor in her hand.

“But I had an excuse for everything,” says Dunstan. “I was working too hard. It was the stress. Of course, my handwriting was bad. I typed all day!”

A neurologist soon diagnosed her with Parkinson’s disease, and, as the full extent of her future with the disease came into view, she made the decision to embrace all that rehabilitation at JFK Johnson Rehabilitation Institute could provide.

First, she committed to cognitive therapy — “it helped enormously,” she says — and today, a decade after her diagnosis, she also joins Parkinson’s rehabilitation programs that focus on boxing, singing and speaking. She’s committed to regular walks in the park with other people living with the disease.

“I have regained my confidence,” Dunstan says. “And I have joy in my life with Parkinson’s.”


Dunstan’s rehabilitation therapies at JFK Johnson are conducted by experienced therapists, many of them certified in Parkinson’s rehabilitation. She regularly attends Rock Steady Boxing®, where recently she was pounding on punching bags, stretching her muscles, and conducting exercises against the gym wall.

“Keep moving,” called out Lauren Karpinski, an exercise physiologist who runs the program specifically to benefit people with movement disorders. The focus is on strong, deliberate movements to strengthen agility, muscular endurance, coordination and overall strength, Karpinski says.

Dunstan feels stronger after each work out.

“For me, exercise is medicine. You feel so much better. More alive,” she says. The comradery with others in the boxing class makes an enormous difference as well. She also participates in JFK Johnson’s ParkinSINGS, a singing group that enables people with Parkinson’s to exercise their vocal cords, strengthen respiratory muscles, and improve speech.

“It also gives me confidence,” Dunstan said. “I was a shower singer, but not in public. Now I have a new level of confidence. I was on vacation and sang Karaoke. I’m out of the shower. Now I sing like no one’s listening.”

She’s grateful for the services and community surrounding JFK Johnson. “Parkinson’s can be a lonely disease,” she says. “But only if you let it.” 

FOR LONG BRANCH MAN, REHABILITATION IMPROVED SYMPTOMS AND OVERALL FUNCTION

Daniel Grynberg of Long Branch learned he had Parkinson’s disease soon after he retired at the age of 67.

The mechanical engineer knew little about the disease and immediately went home to search the internet.

“Then it really hit me,” Grynberg recalls.

Instead of despairing, he committed himself to rehabilitation therapies and intense exercise programs that can improve symptoms and overall function. Grynberg continues to participate in the range of neuroprotective therapies offered at JFK Johnson Rehabilitation Institute, each specifically designed for people living with Parkinson’s and other movement disorders.

“

I made the decision to take advantage of every rehabilitation program available.”

DANIEL GRYNBERG

Grynberg participated in physical and occupational therapies. He also began Rock Steady Boxing®, a non-contact, intense program that can improve balance and core strength. He embraced LOUD Crowd® and SPEAK OUT!®, speech therapies and voice training in group and individual sessions.

For someone who never sang, he now participates in ParkinSINGS, a choir that helps people with Parkinson’s maintain strength in the muscles involved in speech and voice. Grynberg says he now sings as loudly as possible.

“I’m not implying that I sing ‘well’ now, just loudly,” he jokes.

"I find that singing exercises my vocal cords and reduces the volume deterioration that's common among people with this disease. And I enjoy the choir. It's fun!"

The benefits of intense exercise and rehabilitation are wide-ranging. People with Parkinson's can build strength, reduce stiffness, boost circulation and manage pain. Today, 12 years after his diagnosis, Grynberg believes his commitment to therapy has made a significant difference in the course of his disease.

"I believe I would be much worse off today without these efforts," he says. Grynberg also credits the engagement from the Parkinson's community at JFK Johnson, including fellow patients, therapists, nurses and physicians.

"I walk down the hall and wave to people I know. If I have an article on Parkinson's, I share it with others... and they share it with their friends," Grynberg says. He also belongs to a valuable Parkinson's support group for patients.

"We communicate — and commiserate — with each other," he says. "It's more than just exercise. I believe the engagement with other people is so valuable. It lifts my spirits."

Today the married father and grandfather enjoys babysitting his two grandchildren: "They understand me regardless of what Parkinson's has taken away." 🧠

Daniel Grynberg says he found benefits from intense exercise and rehabilitation.





Sara Cuccurullo, M.D., left, and Talya Fleming, M.D., at a CROSS event.

GROUNDBREAKING STROKE-HEART TRIALS TO EXPAND TO NATIONAL CLINICAL TRIAL

The ground-breaking Stroke-HEART™ Trials at JFK Johnson Rehabilitation Institute are expanding nationally as leaders of the research finalize discussions with select rehabilitation centers around the country.

The Stroke-HEART™ Trials found that survivors of serious stroke could reduce their chances of dying within the year by 76 percent if they completed a modified cardiac rehabilitation program that included medically supervised cardiac conditioning, lifestyle counseling and physician follow-up. The research, published in the *Journal of Stroke & Cerebrovascular Diseases*, found the rehabilitation also significantly improved mortality, cardiac performance and overall function.

Co-principal investigators Sara Cuccurullo, M.D., Medical Director and Vice President of JFK Johnson, and Talya Fleming, M.D., Director of the JFK Johnson Stroke Recovery Program and Aftercare Program, will present the latest data from the on-going research at the February 2024 American

Heart Association/American Stroke Association International Stroke Conference in Phoenix, Arizona.

The research counters thinking that stroke patients could not exercise.

“We found that, with some modifications, stroke patients can exercise safely. And we are finding the benefits to be substantial in every measure,” Dr. Fleming said.

The research has the potential to change the future of stroke care and prompt Medicare and other insurers to cover cardiac rehabilitation for stroke survivors, similar to what is generally covered for people with cardio-vascular events such as heart attacks. Stroke and heart attacks both involve the cardio-vascular system.

In January 2023, a new arm of the research integrated stroke patients into cardiac rehabilitation programs, though with adaptations for stroke patients. This study, “Cardiac Rehabilitation of Stroke Survivors (CROSS),” began at JFK Johnson Rehabilitation Institute and will expand into a multi-centered national clinical trial.

The research has created excitement in the field:

- In collaboration with the Johns Hopkins BIOS (Brain Injury Outcomes) Clinical Trials Coordinating Center, Drs. Cuccurullo and Fleming were invited into the nationally recognized NIH-Clinical and Translational Science Award (CTSA) Program to advance research and grant funding.
- The American Academy of Cardiovascular and Pulmonary Rehabilitation (AACVPR), the foremost multidisciplinary professional association dedicated to clinical and research efforts for cardiovascular disease education, prevention, rehabilitation and research, has endorsed the CROSS research and goals.
- In August of 2023, Drs. Cuccurullo and Fleming described the connection between cardiovascular health and cerebrovascular health in their latest publication, *Integrating Cardiac Rehabilitation in Stroke Recovery*, in the journal *PM&R Clinics*.
- At the national American Academy of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation (AAPM&R) Conference, Drs. Cuccurullo and Fleming were awarded the AAPM&R President’s Citation Award for the best research presentation and abstract at the 2022 Annual Assembly. 🌟

RUTGERS' FOOTBALL COACH'S DONATION DEDICATES REHAB ROOM TO FORMER PLAYER ERIC LEGRAND

Rutgers University football coach Gregory Schiano and his wife, Christy, donated \$250,000 to dedicate the Eric LeGrand Spinal Cord Injury Patient Care Room at JFK Johnson Rehabilitation Institute.

The Eric LeGrand Spinal Cord Injury Patient Care Room was unveiled to LeGrand as a surprise when the former Rutgers defensive tackle thought he was paying a routine visit.

"Coach Schiano and Eric have such a special bond, and we are so grateful to be the recipients of this generous gift by


Greg and Christy, which will help us continue delivering groundbreaking, compassionate care," says Robert C. Garrett, FACHE, CEO of Hackensack Meridian Health.

Upon seeing the room for the first time, Eric talked about what it will mean for future patients. "Being in a wheelchair for 12 years now, I've seen places that are accessible and places that are not, and this room is completely state-of-the-art," Eric says. "I'm really excited for the people who will get to use that room because it will really help their rehabilitation process."

The Spinal Cord Injury program at JFK Johnson Rehabilitation Institute offers both inpatient and outpatient treatment, support services, technology and techniques to maximize recovery. Included in the Institute are dedicated spinal cord injury treatment rooms that include a variety of tools and technologies in an accessible space, combined with the clinical expertise needed to treat spinal cord injuries. The Institute also offers the ZeroG Gait and Balance System,

a robotic apparatus that supports a patient's weight during therapy to assist in walking while preventing falls.

"Since his injury, Eric has worked tirelessly to make life better for others impacted by spinal cord injuries," Coach Schiano says. "Making this gift in his honor was our opportunity to do the same. We are so proud of Eric for all that he has achieved, and our gift ensures that others have the same options so that they can receive the best care possible and live their lives to the fullest."

Adds Sara Cuccurullo, M.D., chair, vice president, medical director, JFK Johnson: "We are so grateful to Coach Schiano and his wife, Christy, for their compassionate giving, which will help so many people live life to their highest potential by ensuring we have the best clinical team and most state-of-the-art treatment options." 



COMEDIAN TRACY MORGAN HONORS NURSE AT HACKENSACK MERIDIAN JFK JOHNSON REHABILITATION INSTITUTE CENTER FOR BRAIN INJURIES

*Nurse Elba Ojeda Calls Working with
Brain Injury Patients “Ultra-Gratifying”*

Actor and comedian Tracy Morgan, continuing his support for Hackensack Meridian JFK Johnson Rehabilitation Institute, once again presented the annual “Tracy Morgan Award for Excellence in Rehabilitation Nursing” to a health care professional dedicated to patients with brain injuries.

After his November performance at the Bergen County Performing Arts Center in Englewood, Morgan gave the 2023 award to Elba Ojeda, RN, CRRN, BSN, a nurse who has worked at the JFK Johnson Center for Brain Injuries for 18 years. He called Ojeda and other JFK Johnson nurses, physicians and therapists up to the stage.

Elba Ojeda and Tracy Morgan.



“This is my family right here,” Morgan told audience members, nearly all who remained in their seats. “When I was in a coma, these are the people who were there.”

Morgan handed the award to Ojeda and hugged her as the packed audience cheered. “This is empathy,” Morgan told Ojeda and the other health care professionals on stage. “These are people who put their own lives aside and help others who are suffering.”

Sara Cuccurullo, M.D., Medical Director of the JFK Johnson Rehabilitation Institute, thanked Morgan for continuing to honor rehabilitation nurses dedicated to supporting patients with brain injuries.

“And thank you for inspiring our patients every day by sharing your own journey to recovery,” Dr. Cuccurullo said. She said Ojeda exemplifies the best in rehabilitation nursing and is skilled, experienced, and dedicated to her patients and their families.

In 2014, Morgan was in a coma after a serious vehicle accident on the New Jersey Turnpike. He was treated at the JFK Johnson Center for Brain Injuries and frequently shares his experiences to thank the health care professionals who enabled his recovery. Morgan said he also shares his story to inspire others with brain injuries.

“I think there was a reason my life was saved,” he said. Morgan said after his accident he had to learn to stand, sit, walk and talk again.

Morgan starred for seven seasons on NBC’s Emmy and Golden Globe Award-winning “30 Rock.” He also was a cast member for seven seasons on Saturday Night Live. He starred in and produced the TBS comedy, The Last O.G.

“This award is such an honor,” Ojeda said. “I love being supportive to my patients and educating their families. And to see people come back to us months, maybe a year, later and they are 100 percent better. It is ultra-gratifying.”



Tracy Morgan, seated, surrounded by physicians, nurses and other health care professionals at the JFK Johnson Center for Brain Injuries.

She is a graduate of the Muhlenberg Hospital School of Nursing in Plainfield, New Jersey.

Ojeda said she credits her faith for giving her strength to continue in her challenging work with brain injury patients. “You need immense patience. Sometimes I will say prayers, ‘Our Fathers’ or ‘Hail Marys’ as I wait for a patient to complete a task.”

Also on stage was Brian Greenwald, M.D., Medical Director of the JFK Johnson Center for Brain Injuries. He directed Morgan’s care and treatment during his rehabilitation.

“It’s inspiring for all of us to see Tracy continuing to succeed as a producer, actor and comedian. He is accomplishing everything he wants to do in his life. That’s what we want for all our patients,” Dr. Greenwald said. 🌀

SCHOLARLY ACTIVITIES 2023

Current Research in Progress

1. **JFK Johnson Rehabilitation Institute Awarded Traumatic Brain Injury Model System (TBIMS)**
Sponsored by the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research, Administration for Community Living, US Department of Health and Human Services, research to meet the needs of individuals with traumatic brain injury. September 2017-2022 (5 year grant plus 1 Year extension post COVID).
2. **Cuccurullo, Sara, M.D., Fleming, Talya, M.D., Greiss, Christine, D.O., Eckert Anne, Ph.D., Scarpatti, Rosann, RN, HMH-IRB, Stroke Recovery Program Clinical Outcomes Trial, Mortality, Incidence of New Strokes and Readmissions and Functional Outcomes Trial.** JFK Johnson Rehabilitation Institute, Rutgers, Robert Wood Johnson Medical School, 2015 - Present.
3. **Cuccurullo, Sara, M.D., Fleming, Talya, M.D., Petrosyan, Hayk, Ph.D., Greiss, Christine, D.O., Ray, Arlen, PT, Eckert, Anne, AuD, MBA, CCC/A, Scarpatti, Rosann, RN, Cardiac Rehabilitation of Stroke Survivors (CROSS) Pilot Study (2023-present).**
4. **Greiss, Christine, D.O., Cuccurullo, Sara, M.D., Fleming, Talya, M.D., HMH-IRB, Stroke Recovery Program – Changes in AMPAC Following SSRI Administration, 2018 - Present.**
5. **Joki, Jaclyn, M.D., Cuccurullo, Sara, M.D., Fleming, Talya, M.D., Rutgers-IRB, Transcatheter Aortic Valve Replacement Minimally Invasive Aortic Valve Replacement and Their Effects on Cognition and Function and Transitions of Care for Stroke Patients, 2018 - Present.**
6. **Cuccurullo, Sara, M.D., Bagay, Leslie, M.D., NY/NJ COVID-19 Rehabilitation Consortium, 2020.**
7. **Brown, David, D.O., Continues Ongoing Phrenic Nerve EMG Study Pre and Post EMG findings after Pacer Implant, December 2019 - Present.**
8. **Parikh, Sagar, M.D., Cuccurullo, Sara, M.D., Petrosyan, Hayk, Ph.D., Leonardi, Christopher, M.D., “Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Pain Physician as the Gate Keeper in the Comprehensive Management of Low Back Pain,” December 2021 - Ongoing.**
9. **Cuccurullo, Sara, M.D., Maria, Montealegre, OTD, Hayk Petrosyan, Ph.D., “The EMAGINE study”, October 2022 - Present.**
10. **Goldin, Yelena, Ph.D., Tremaine, Monique, Ph.D., MSCP, Dart, Georgianna, Psy.D., Petrosyan, Hayk, PhD, TBI Model Systems: Improving longitudinal assessment and tracking of activity limitations in individuals with traumatic brain injury, September 2018 - Present.**
11. **Tremaine, Monique, Ph.D., MSCP, Bernard, Kate, LSW, CCM, C.B.I.S., Dart, Georgianna, Psy.D., Comparative Effectiveness of Inpatient Rehabilitation Interventions for TBI (Care 4 TBI Collaborative). NINDS, October 2021 - Present.**

12. **Greenwald, Brian, M.D., Tremaine, Monique, Ph.D., MSCP, Dart, Georgianna, Psy.D., Long-term Trajectories of Cognition and Psychological Health in Civilians and Veterans: Understanding Risk to Inform Targeted Prevention and Personalized Interventions, October 2022 - Present.**

Text Books

Cuccurullo, Sara, M.D., Editor-in-Chief, (2004, 2010, 2014, 2019) Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Board Review, First, Second, Third and Forth Editions Demos/Springer Publishing, N.Y., N.Y.

Peer Reviewed Publications

1. **Cuccurullo, Sara, M.D., Steinberg, David, M.D., Faurot, Keturah R, Ph.D., PA, MPG, Thompson, Karla, Ph.D., Alexander, Joshua, M.D., Braza, Diane, M.D., Cuccurullo, Sara, M.D., Herrera, Joseph, D.O., Sliwa, James, D.O., Weiss, Lyn, M.D., “Burnout and Wellness Strategies Utilized by Academic Psychiatry Programs: An Analysis and Perspective from the AAP Chairs Council” American Journal of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation 2023, March 24, doi: 10.1097/PHM.00000000000012245, Online ahead of Print, PMID: 37026874.**
2. **Fleming, Talya, M.D., Melamed E, Rydberg L, Ambrose AF, Bhavaraju-Sanka R, Fine JS, Fleming TK, Herman E, Phipps Johnson JL, Kucera JR, Longo M, Niehaus W, Oleson CV, Sampsel S, Silver JK, Smith MM, Verduzco-Gutierrez M, Multi-Disciplinary collaborative consensus guidance statement on the assessment and treatment of neurologic sequelae in patients with Post-Acute Sequelae of SARS-CoV-2 Infection (PASC). PM R. 2023 Mar 29. doi: 10.1002/pmrj.12976. Epub ahead of print. PMID: 36989078.**
3. **Fleming, Talya, M.D., Schwartz JK, Belagaje, SR, Katz LW, Strow JT., “Medication After Stroke” Archives Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, 2023 April 24: S0003-9993(23)00229-0. Doi: 10.1016/j.apmr.2023.03.029. Epub ahead of print, PMID: 37100269.**
4. **Cuccurullo, Sara, M.D., Fleming, Talya, M.D., Petrosyan Hayk, Ph.D., Integrating Cardiac Rehabilitation in Stroke Recovery. Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation Clinics. Published online 2023 Aug 11. [https://www.pmr.theclinics.com/article/S1047-9651\(23\)00058-X/fulltext](https://www.pmr.theclinics.com/article/S1047-9651(23)00058-X/fulltext).**
5. **Jacobs JW, Fleming, Talya, M.D., Jaggi R, Stanford FC, Spector ND, Booth GS, Silver JK. Analysis of Race and Ethnicity Among United States Medical Board Leadership. J Women's Health (Larchmt). 2023 Jul 26. doi: 10.1089/jwh.2023.0088. Epub ahead of print. PMID: 37498526.**
6. **Harris Kristen, M.D., Zhou Y, Jou Stacey, M.D., Greenwald Brian, M.D., Disorders of Consciousness Programs: Components, Organization, and Implementation: Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Clinics of North America, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pmr.2023.06.014>.**

7. **Zhou, Yi, M.D., Chung, Michael, M.D., Lin, Lei, M.D., Baisre-de Leon, A, Liu, J, Cuccurullo, Sara, M.D., “Delayed Diagnosis in a Patient with Progressive Proximal Weakness: A Clinical Vignette.” American Journal of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation. 2023 Jun 1; 102(6):e83-e86. doi: 10.1097/PHM.0000000000002174 Dec22 PMID: 36728968.**
8. **Petrosyan, Hayk, Ph.D., Leonardi, Christopher, M.S., Thakral Aakash, M.D., Roth, Jason, M.D., Russoniello, Nicholas, Goldin, Yelena, Ph.D., Parikh, Sagar, M.D., Barriers and Factors Associated with Adherence to a Home Exercise Program of Adults with Musculoskeletal Pain, Journal of Back and Musculoskeletal Rehabilitation, Accepted, In-Press.**
9. **Dewan, Krish, M.D., Sabatino, Marlena E BA, Cuccurullo, Sara, M.D., Joki, Jaclyn, M.D., Fleming, Talya, M.D., Boylston, Marianne APN, Wang, Suk-Ying, RN, MSN, Chao, Joshua, M.D., Lee, Leonard, T M.D., FACS, Cognitive Function after Transcatheter and Mini-Aortic Valve Replacement: A Multicenter Prospective Cohort Study: Journal of the American College of Surgeons, 236(5);PS13, May 2023 DOI: 10.1097/XCS.0000000000000615.**

Abstracts/Poster Presentations

Association of Academic Physiatrists National Meeting, February 2023

1. **Jou, Stacey, M.D., Gordon, Phillip, M.D., Chan, Jessie, M.D., “Early Intervention to Improve Function in a Rare Case of Terson’s Syndrome after Traumatic Brain Injury.”**
2. **Matthew Lee BA, Stacey Jou M.D., Steven Markos M.D., “Admission from home to acute rehabilitation for multidisciplinary management of patients with Parkinson’s Disease: two case presentations.”**
3. **Wolbert, Jonathan, D.O., Jou, Stacey, M.D., Urs, Krishna, M.D., “Monoplegia to Multiple Myeloma, A Unique Presentation.”**
4. **Yun, James, M.D., Jou, Stacey, M.D., Greiss, Christine, D.O., “Uncommon Presentation of Moyamoya Disease: A Case Report.”**
5. **Heckelmann, Eric, M.D., D. Ratanski, Jafri, Iqbal, M.D., “Hemiballismus After Subacute Stroke: A Case Report of Inpatient Rehabilitation Management.”**
6. **Ace, Jessica, M.D., Escaldi, Steven, D.O., Eric Heckelman, M.D., “Hallucinations and Cyproheptadine Following Intrathecal Baclofen Withdrawal.”**
7. **Zhou, Yi, M.D., Galibov, Michael, D.O., Bucek, Thomas, Lin, Lei, M.D., “Found Down Extremity Compartment Syndrome in a 26-Year-Old Male: A Case Report.”**
8. **Zhou, Yi, M.D., Ferber, Ally, Gordon, Phillip, M.D., Greenwald, Brian, M.D., “Post Traumatic Guillain Barre Syndrome.”**

9. **Zhou, Yi, M.D., Henry, Roger, Greenwald, Brian, M.D.,** "A Rare Case of Esthesioneuroblastoma: A Case Report."
10. **Ferber, Ally, Zhou, Yi, M.D., Greenwald, Brian, M.D.,** "Persistent Facial Nerve Palsy After Middle Meningeal Artery Embolization: A Case Report."
11. **Zhou, Yi, M.D., Jamal, Faraz, M.D., Chan, Jessie, M.D., Shen, Shirley, M.D., Lin, Lei, M.D.,** "A Rare Case of Parinaud Syndrome Caused by Thalamic Hemorrhage."
12. **Wolbert, Jonathan, D.O., Chung, Michael, M.D., Brown, David, D.O.,** "Scapulothoracic Syndrome: A Good History is Telling."
13. **Wolbert, Jonathan, D.O., Urs, Krishna, M.D.,** "Anaphylaxis to What? A Rare Case of tPA Induced Angioedema."
14. **Wolbert, Jonathan, D.O., Jou, Stacey, M.D., Urs, Krishna, M.D.,** "Monoplegia to Multiple Myeloma: A Unique Presentation."
15. **Shen, Shirley, M.D., Zhou, Yi, M.D., Greiss, Christine, D.O., Yun, James, M.D., Galibov, Michael, M.D., Chan, Jessie, M.D., Jamal, Faraz, M.D.,** "Functional Considerations of Right Frontal Infarct in an American Sign Language User: A Case Report."
16. **Jamal, Faraz, M.D., Zhou, Yi, M.D., Shen, Shirley, M.D., Galibov, Michael, M.D., Yun, James, M.D.,** "Neuropsychiatric Manifestations of Osmotic Demyelination Syndrome: A Case Report."
17. **Galibov, Michael, M.D., Zhou, Yi, M.D., Yun, James, M.D., Chan, Jessie, M.D., Jamal, Faraz, M.D., Shen, Shirley, M.D.,** "Bilateral Paramedian Thalamic Syndrome in a 63 Female Secondary to Artery of Percheron Infarction: A Case Report."
18. **Gordon, Phillip, M.D., Zhou, Yi, M.D., Escaldi, Steven, D.O.,** "Benefits of a customized Inter-injection interval for Severe Cervical Dystonia."
19. **Gordon, Phillip, M.D., Wolbert, Jonathan, D.O., Brown, David, D.O.,** "Electrodiagnostic Findings of Brachial Plexopathy Masked by Hemiparesis."

American Academy of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation New Orleans, LA, November 2023

1. **Galibov, Michael, M.D., Jafri, Iqbal, M.D., Chan, Jessie, M.D., Yun, James, M.D., Jamal, Faraz, M.D., Lin, Lei, M.D.,** "Nervous Under Pressure: Severe Femoral Neuropathy Post Cardiac Catheterization: A Case Report."
2. **Galibov, Michael, M.D., Chung, Michael, M.D., Shen, Shirley, M.D., Jamal, Faraz, M.D., Yun, James, M.D., Chan, Jessie, M.D.,** "Facial Neuropathy Following Root Canal Hypochlorite Toxicity: A Case Report."
3. **Yun, James, Jou, Stacey, M.D., Galibov, Michael, M.D., Greiss, Christine, D.O.,** "Post-Partum Inpatient Rehabilitation to Facilitate Recovery after HELLP Syndrome Complicated by Severe Stroke: A Case Report."
4. **Zhou, Yi, M.D., Chan, Jessie, M.D., Babar, Kasim, D.O., Brown, David, D.O.,** "Electrophysiological Patterns in Two Cases of Infant Botulism."

5. **Yi, Zhou, M.D., Chan, Jessie, M.D., Greenwald, Brian, M.D.,** "Managing Potential Triggers of Diffuse Rash in Brain Abscess Patient: A Case Report."
6. **Zhou, Yi, M.D., Altonji, Kathryn, M.D., Kakkanat, Ashley, M.D., Greenwald, Brian, M.D.,** "Profound Verbal Function Improvements After Single-Dose Zolpidem in Two Minimally Conscious Patients with Severe Traumatic Brain Injuries."

National Presentations:

1. **Cuccurullo, Sara, M.D.,** AAP Annual Conference, Speed Networking- Early Career Workshop, Mentoring/Sponsoring of Early Career Physicians, Anaheim, CA, February 23, 2023.
2. **Fleming, Talya, M.D.,** AAP Annual Conference, "Updates in the Evaluation and Management of Breathing Disorders in Post-Acute Sequelae of COVID, Anaheim, CA, February 2023.
3. **Cuccurullo, Sara, M.D.,** University of Alabama, Grand Rounds, "Investigating and Analyzing the Effect of a Comprehensive Stroke Recovery Program on All-Cause Mortality Cardiovascular Performance Function and Readmissions" Virtual, February 3, 2023.
4. **Cuccurullo, Sara, M.D.,** University of Miami, Grand Rounds, Keynote Speaker, "Investigating and Analyzing the Effect of a Comprehensive Stroke Recovery Program on All-Cause Mortality Cardiovascular Performance Function and Readmissions," Miami, FL, March 10, 2023.
5. **Cuccurullo, Sara, M.D., Fleming, Talya, M.D., Petrosyan, Hayk, Ph.D.,** CMS Coverage and Analysis Group, Update on Investigating and Analyzing the Effect of a Comprehensive Stroke recovery Program On All-Cause Mortality, Cardiovascular Performance and Re-Admissions (virtual), March 14, 2023.
6. **Shustorovich, Alexander, D.O.,** Grand Rounds/Conference on Complex Regional Pain Syndrome Management for the New York University Orthopedics Department, March 20, 2023.
7. **Uustal, Heikki, M.D.,** Baylor College of Medicine, Kessler, NYU- Annual Review Course in PM&R (virtual), "Upper Limb Orthotics", "Lower Limb Orthotics", "Upper Limb Orthotics", "Lower Limb Orthotics", "Pediatric Limb Deficiency and Prosthetics", "Normal Gait and Prosthetic Gait Deviations", Houston Texas, March 27, 2023, March 16, 2023, May 2-3, 2023.
8. **Cuccurullo, Sara, M.D.,** AAPM&R National Meeting, Navigating Early Career Decisions for Residents and New Graduates; Success in Psychiatry, "Negotiating Your Contract-What you Need to Know", April 15, 2023.
9. **Cuccurullo Sara, M.D., Fleming, Talya, M.D.,** University of Kansas, Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Grand Rounds, "Stroke Recovery Program: Extending Cardiac Rehabilitation to Stroke" (virtual), August 17, 2023.
10. **Cuccurullo, Sara, M.D.,** "Investigating and Analyzing the Effect of a Comprehensive Stroke Recovery Program on All-Cause Mortality Cardiovascular Performance Function and Readmissions" -

Stroke Rehabilitation Conference; Challenges and Innovations in Stroke Rehabilitation, Northwell Health (virtual), October 14, 2023.

11. **Fleming, Talya, M.D.,** Essential Updates in the Physiatric Management of Post-COVID Conditions: Autonomic, Neurologic, Cognitive and Pediatric Disorders: Healthcare Disparities in COVID-19 and PASC and AAPM&R's position in DEI.
12. **Cuccurullo, Sara, M.D., Fleming, Talya, M.D.,** Transitioning to Value-Based Stroke Care, AAPM&R National Meeting, New Orleans, LA, November 2023.

International

1. **Cuccurullo, Sara, M.D., Fleming, Talya, M.D.,** American Heart Association/American Stroke Association, International Stroke Conference, "The Implementation of Aerobic Exercise in Stroke Rehabilitation: When, Where and How? Phoenix, AZ, February 8, 2024.
2. **Cuccurullo, Sara, M.D., Fleming, Talya, M.D.,** International Stroke Conference "From Stroke to Recovery: Rehabilitation Across the Continuum of Care; Mobility and Physical Activity: Exercise in the Community", Dallas, TX, February 8, 2023.
3. **Fleming, Talya, M.D.,** "International Clinical Cytometry Society (ICCS) DI Webinar, "Strategies to Address Patient Care and Workforce Diversity, Equity and Inclusion", Glenview, IL, February 14, 2023.
4. **Escaldi, Steven, D.O.,** International Tox-Net Annual Meeting, Verona, Italy, March 16-18, 2023 and Berlin, Germany, October 7-8, 2023.

Awards

1. **Cuccurullo, Sara, M.D.,** University of Miami, UHealth Jackson Annual Academic Day, Keynote Speaker Award, March 2023.
2. **Greiss, Christine, D.O.,** "Healthcare Hero of the Month", JFK Johnson Rehabilitation Institute, April 2024.
3. **Fleming, Talya, M.D.,** Brian Greenwald M.D., Castle Connolly Top Doctors in Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, April 2023 **Joki, Jaclyn, M.D.,** National Trauma Survivors Day- Rutgers RWJ Shock Trauma Hero, New Brunswick, NJ, May 17, 2023.
4. **Steven Escaldi, D.O.,** "Kathy Wong Award," June 2023.
5. **Craig Van Dien, M.D.,** "Teacher of Year Award," June 2023.
6. **Brian Greenwald, M.D., Ofure Luke M.D., Steven Markos, Jaclyn Joki,** Rutgers-RWJ Volunteer Faculty Award, New Brunswick, NJ, June 21, 2023.
7. **Fleming, Talya, M.D.,** AAPM&R - PM&R Public Service, Health Equity and Advocacy Award, November 2023.
8. **Cuccurullo, Sara, M.D.,** ROI-NJ 2023 Healthcare Influencer, October 2023.



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