

MEET THE FELLOWS

2018 – 2019

Allison Bell

Hope Choman

Eric Cooper

Allyson Galishoff

Kasey Sinha

Allison Bell

Internship: Stamford Hospital/Bennett Cancer Center

Stamford, CT

I entered the field of social work later than most. After years of working in the advertising industry and raising a family, I wanted to do something that had more meaning to me personally and professionally. I went into my MSW studies thinking I'd like to work in the field of substance abuse. I had no awareness of palliative care or palliative social work. After an experience in my Generalist-year field placement, and reflecting on my personal history, I found myself drawn to the authenticity and significance of palliative social work.



In my first year at Westchester Medical Center, I met a man dying of cancer. He was also an alcoholic. We didn't talk for long but he was struggling with all the hurt and chaos he had created in his life and in most of his significant relationships. After our conversation, it struck me how hard it must be to die, when you feel like you haven't lived well. The idea of helping someone, in some small way, find peace at this stage of life, seemed like a genuine need and something I felt compelled to do. The Palliative Care Fellowship at Fordham provided me with the opportunity and the skills to pursue this work.

My field placement at Stamford Hospital afforded me two distinct experiences. The first half of the year, I worked with the inpatient Palliative Care Team helping patients and families navigate end-of-life. This experience was life-changing and provided me with an incredible opportunity for personal and professional growth. The second half of the year, I worked with the outpatient team at the Bennett Cancer Center and witnessed how palliative care can be integrated throughout the disease continuum. This time provided me with the opportunity to work alongside people navigating treatment and living life with cancer. Every day I spent at my field placement presented me with the opportunity to learn something new and to work alongside an amazing group of professionals who are leaders in their fields.

Some people find it hard to understand choosing palliative care as their practice focus, but I feel a deep sense of honor and gratitude toward every person I came in contact with and humbled by so many amazing people and families I met and worked with along the way. I will always be grateful to this Fellowship for its support, guidance and shared knowledge as I strive to become a professional social worker within the field of palliative care.

Hope Choman

Internship: Montefiore Medical Center, Palliative Care Service

New York, NY

I became interested in the field of palliative care social work based on my personal experience with family members with serious illness. Family members who are close relations have died from, or are living with cancer. I believe that the most poignant circumstances that led me to social work as a profession was witnessing one of my young relatives survive her cancer diagnosis and my aunt die due to ALS. I was with both of these individuals when they were diagnosed and was with them throughout their illness and treatment. Each situation revealed different life lessons and I had the realization that I wanted to do more in my own life to help others going through similar circumstances. With each family member, I was a witness not only to seeing what they were going through as patients, but I also observed the healthcare team members who helped my family through these difficult times. I saw the impact and the difference they made for young relative, my aunt, and the rest of my family. In both instances, I came to the realization that I wanted to be part of a field that encouraged helping others going through what my family was going through.



The Palliative Care Fellowship provided me with the valuable skills I need to enter the workforce and embark on a career in palliative care. One of the greatest skills I valued learning was the holistic approach of palliative care of seeing the patient as a whole individual, working with their strengths, and not just their illness. It is extremely important as a palliative social worker on an interdisciplinary team to be the patient's advocate and help them shape what they believe to be the best quality of life from their perspective. It is also an important role of the palliative social worker to assist interdisciplinary team members in approaching patients holistically, and not only focusing on treating the patient's medical diagnosis.

Palliative social workers provide support not only to the patients, but to their loved ones as well. It is important to remember that each patient is part of a family system and each member in the patient's family system will be affected by the illness. At Montefiore Medical Center, I provided services to patients and their loved ones, including emotional support through individual and family counseling. Some of the most meaningful experiences were in family meetings discussing goals of care and helping them with advance care planning.

Eric Cooper

Internship: Danbury Hospital, Palliative Care Service

Danbury, CT

I think it's safe to say that everyone gets into the field of social work because they have a desire to help others. I know that's why I did. In 2012 I graduated from Gettysburg College with a Bachelor's in Religious Studies. From there I worked for a global health non-profit. While I believed in the organization's mission, I was yearning for the opportunity to work directly with the people I wanted to serve. Prior to entering graduate school, I volunteered with The Den for Grieving Kids, a Connecticut-based children's bereavement group. It was challenging work, but it was pointing me in the right direction.



I began the Palliative Care Fellowship at Fordham in the Fall of 2018. My Specialist year field placement was with the Danbury Hospital Circle of Life award winning Palliative Care team. As a member of the Palliative Care Consultation Service, I had the opportunity to help people through some of the most difficult moments of their lives. To say it is the most fulfilling work I've done in my life is an understatement. My field experience confirmed for me that palliative care was the career path for me.

As much as I learned about palliative care during the course of the Fellowship, I've learned even more about myself as a clinician and as an individual. My strengths were able to shine, and my weaknesses were exposed. I've grown tremendously over the past year through the Fellowship. I've come to find that this is special work that we do. It is not for everyone, but if one has the empathy and emotional fortitude to do this work, this is highly fulfilling work.

The Palliative Care Fellowship is responsible for why I feel confident moving onto the next stage of my career. It has opened so many doors and I'm excited for what is next to come.

Allyson Galishoff

Internship: *Cancercare*

New York, NY

Although I graduated from college many years ago with an interest in helping people, my life took several turns before I realized that a graduate social work degree would provide me with the best skill set to do so. After almost fifteen years in the business world, first IN marketing and then as an executive recruiter for Wall Street firms, I gave birth to my second child. At this point, I decided that I wanted to seek out work that was more intrinsically rewarding to me. At first, school counseling seemed like a perfect match in that I could help other children and their families as they faced challenges in their academic lives. However, working alongside the social worker at a charter school, I realized that her skill set allowed her to help these students and their families in a much more holistic fashion than my training had prepared me to do. As such, I decided to go back to school for an MSW with an open mind as to where my studies would take me.



During my first-year internship, I was placed at Stanley Isaacs Senior Center where I was fortunate to interact with seniors who were vibrant and active. However, many faced chronic health issues, loneliness and isolation. My experience with this population was far more interesting than I had ever hoped for and opened my eyes to the various difficulties people have as they age-in-place in their own homes. When I heard about the Palliative Care Fellowship and learned that palliative care encompasses assisting individuals and their families at all stages of a chronic illness, I became particularly interested. Simultaneously, as I approached middle age, my peers and their parents began to face many chronic and serious health issues. Often the process of navigating these issues from a physical, emotional and social perspective overwhelmed even the savviest of us. With this new perspective, I decided to pursue the Palliative Care Fellowship.

My placement this year was at *Cancercare*, where I provided individual and group counseling to patients diagnosed with cancer, and their families. In addition, I ran several bereavement groups for individuals who had lost a loved one to cancer. The clients I worked with inspired me as many of them viewed their diagnosis as a chance to grow their emotional selves. These people are my heroes as they managed to face some of the most challenging of circumstances with dignity and courage each and every day. Through the education, mentoring, experience and contacts that I have received as a Palliative Care Fellow, I am confident that I have the best foundation to help patients and their families along in their journey. I am truly grateful that I have found this line of work and look forward to a rewarding career helping people navigate this difficult time in their lives.

Kasey Sinha

Internship: Calvary Hospital

New York, NY

I first learned about palliative care when my grandmother was dying. I wanted so badly to know how to support my grandmother and family members through the process, but realized I knew next to nothing about the dying process. I began to read everything I could about death and dying, and became exposed to the field of palliative care. I connected with the field's focus on quality of life and its holistic, multidisciplinary approach to the care of patients with serious illness and their families. I read every book I could get my hands on and signed up for workshops on palliative care and grief. The more I learned, the more sure I was that palliative social work was my vocation. When I began studying at Fordham, I knew that applying to the Palliative Care Fellowship was something I needed to do.



My first year field placement was on the Palliative Care Team at New York-Presbyterian/Weill Cornell Medicine. As part of my field work, I made bereavement outreach calls to family and friends of patients who had died at the hospital. I conducted grief counseling and psychosocial assessments, and provided psychosocial support to patients in both the inpatient and outpatient settings. I was grateful to be selected for the Palliative Care Fellowship at Fordham, and was selected to intern at Calvary Hospital in the Bronx. Calvary Hospital is the only hospital in the country whose specialty is providing palliative care to patients with serious illness. My time at Calvary taught me so much about working with patients and family members in a palliative care setting. I provided supportive counseling to my patients and families, conducted psychosocial assessments for newly admitted patients, collaborated with nurses and technicians on complex family issues, provided emotional support to family members, connected patients and family members with services and resources, facilitated/co-facilitated family and patient support groups, and conducted bereavement outreach. I learned so much from the patients, families, and colleagues that I worked with, and my time at Calvary further solidified my desire to work in palliative care. After graduation, I will be joining the Palliative Care Team at Mount Sinai Beth Israel as a Social Work Fellow.

The Fordham Palliative Care Fellowship allowed me to learn grow and develop as a palliative care social work student, both academically and clinically. The Fellowship community, comprised of the Fellowship Director, my fellow interns, professors, Faculty Advisor, field instructor, and guest lecturers, was incredibly supportive, and I learned so much from their experiences in palliative care. The work is not easy, but being able to learn, reflect, and support one another during the fellowship had an enormous impact on how I approached the work. The Fordham Palliative Care Fellowship made me the social worker I am today, and for that I am indelibly grateful.