

MEET THE FELLOWS

2021 – 2022

Matthew Catapano

Candace Feit

Daniel Koteen

Edward O’Hanlan

Malika Spruiell

Matthew Catapano

Internship: Mount Sinai Medical Center – Oncology Service and ICU

New York, NY

Like so many others, the onset of the pandemic offered me a chance to hit pause and reflect on the direction of my life. As a foreign aid worker with Doctors Without Borders, the idea of continuing work so far away from home, suddenly began to lose its appeal. Fordham, and the Palliative Care Fellowship, provided me with an opportunity to further develop my skills and find a practice within my own community.

As the world changed around us, the road my classmates and I journeyed through was a rocky one. It seems strange to say, as a newly minted MSW graduate, that we completed this program without setting foot in a Fordham classroom. The pandemic took away much of the graduate school experience we had hoped for and expected.



My Generalist year field placement, during the first year of the Covid pandemic, was at a meals-on-wheels program in Queens. Protocols and procedures had to be reinvented as we transitioned to assessing and interacting with clients via telephone, rather than face-to-face. My field placement for the Palliative Care Fellowship was in person at Mt Sinai Hospital, first in Oncology and then in the ICU. I realized very quickly how my Generalist year internship had trained me for a new-normal of change and uncertainty. All of those hours on the phone with clients made me a better listener and made me more patient. Now, sitting in hospital rooms with families after more “bad news,” my ability to understand and express compassion became even more practiced and refined.

Palliative social work today matters now more than ever. The ability to connect and remain grounded during these extraordinary times has allowed me to be a resource for clients and families in ways I could not have imagined before. The education, training, and mentoring that I received as a Fordham Palliative Care Fellow prepared me for a world where obstacles sometimes seem insurmountable and endless, yet the capacity to love and be compassionate remains an essential part the role. I am grateful to have been part of such a non-traditional experience It has prepared me to go out and make a difference in a time when people need it the most.

Candace Feit

Internship: MJHS Hospice and Palliative Care

Brooklyn, NY

After working as a documentary photographer and artist for 15 years, I wanted to take many of the skills and interests that drew me to that career and apply them to a career in social work. I had spent over a decade living and working throughout West and South Africa and South Asia and had often found myself photographing people during some of their most challenging and difficult days. Being able to be present with people, connecting with them, and learning about them and their lives, was what drew me to documentary photography and it's also what made me want to be a palliative social worker.



My internship this year was at MJHS, providing support to patients receiving home hospice services and their caregivers. My patients were located in Brooklyn and ranged in age from 40 to 103 years old. In my role as Hospice Social Work Intern, I visited patients and their caregivers anywhere from once a week to once a month, depending on their needs. My goal was to provide psychosocial support, empathetic presence, information on disease progression, connection to concrete services and answering any questions that they may have. Working with patients and caregivers in this setting was an extraordinary experience and reaffirmed my desire to enter this field.

The Palliative Care Fellowship also provided additional specialized training and a dedicated Field Seminar for the fellows, led by a highly experienced palliative social worker. Our field seminar provided another layer of support and guidance for the Fellows while we were training to enter the field. I was also assigned a Career Mentor through the Fellowship who provided me with additional contacts and advice on seeking a job post graduation.

Being invited into someone's life and being allowed to bear witness to their experience as they and their loved ones work toward accepting a terminal diagnosis is an honor. The Palliative Care Fellowship and my internship worked together to prepare me to do this work and enter the workforce with a set of essential concrete skills and experience that would not have been possible without them.

Daniel Koteen

Internship: Danbury Hospital, Palliative Care Service

Danbury, CT

It was an honor to be chosen as a Palliative Care Fellow at Fordham University Graduate School of Social Service. My interest in palliative and hospice care grew out of my experience of losing my to malignant melanoma. The care that he received from the hospice team, and their approach to supporting our entire family through his illness, changed my life. I have always wanted to help people and social work was the best way for me to do this. As a Palliative Care Fellow, I learned to support and care for patients, with skill and empathy, especially as end of life approaches. I felt I was honoring the lessons my father taught me during the course of his illness. Learning to become a palliative social worker allowed me to be true to my values, which will shape my practice as a palliative and hospice care social worker.



My internship for my Specialist year was at Danbury Hospital. I was a part of the inpatient Palliative Care Department. The team consisted of a social worker, who was my supervisor, a palliative care physician, and several Advanced Practice Nurses. I also worked regularly with the primary interdisciplinary teams in the hospital. These experiences helped me to gain skills as a palliative social worker. The work was challenging, but also so fulfilling. It gave me a sense of purpose and solidified my desire to work with seriously ill people and families.

Being a Palliative Care Fellow this year has given me many wonderful opportunities in addition to my internship. It changed the trajectory as a social work student, through my class in Palliative Social Work and in Grief, Loss and Bereavement. I developed a network of peers and mentors. The tuition assistance provided by the Fellowship through the generous support of the Kathy and Brian MacLean Scholarship in Palliative Care made it possible to focus more of my time on my studies and internship. Their funding also made it possible for me to attend the Social Work Hospice and Palliative Care Network (SWHPN) 2022 conference in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

I am poised to begin my career in this important and rewarding field. I am thankful to have pursued my education at Fordham University, and to have had the good fortune to be a Palliative Care Fellow. I am certain I will continue to learn in my career as a social worker and look forward to maintaining a connection to Fordham and to my cohort of Palliative Care Fellows as I begin my new life journey.

Edward “Ned” O’Hanlan

Internship: MJHS Hospice and Palliative Care

New York, NY

My decision to apply for the Palliative Care Fellowship came from working with a student during my Generalist year. After the loss of his mother, my work was focused on the changing circumstances of their life. My application to Fordham a year prior was written with the unspecified desire to help – and during that time I found I was doing just that.



My field placement was with Metropolitan Jewish Health Systems (MJHS). Operating in Northern Manhattan, I provided hospice services to patients in their own homes, in skilled nursing facilities, and in inpatient hospital settings. I had the opportunity to work with people of all sociodemographic backgrounds and with different types of illnesses. I gained clinical skills in assessment, supportive counseling, and understanding family dynamics that are common at end of life. I spent many hours providing anticipatory grief counseling to caregivers, arranging and facilitating family meetings with different members of my interdisciplinary team and developing plans of care based on the individual needs of each patient. I also gained valuable experience in helping clients navigate the Medicare and Medicaid system, identifying resources that would benefit families, and advocating on behalf of people whose time was better spent being present with their loved ones, and not fighting for services or worrying about finances.

After this year I still feel that I have so much more to learn. I was able to attend the SWHPN Conference in Santa Fe, where I met and learned with palliative and hospice social workers from all around the country. It was inspiring to be around so many people who had the same innate desire to assist those going through such challenging times. Overall, the Palliative Care Fellowship provided an amazing experience of being both a student and a burgeoning clinician. I was given the opportunity to get out into the community as a hospice social worker and take on the responsibilities that came with it – but all while knowing that I had the support of a dedicated group of peers and Director that I could look to when I needed advice. And as I begin my post-MSW Fellowship in Palliative Social Work at Medstar in Washington D.C., I just feel very lucky to have started this journey with their guidance.

Malika Spruiell

Internship: *CancerCare*

New York, NY

My interest in palliative care began as I learned that I would be helping seriously ill patients and their family members manage symptoms and maintain their quality of life. I was fascinated with the prospect of working with an interdisciplinary team of physicians, nurses, social workers, and chaplains who could provide comprehensive care to the whole person. I knew that being a palliative social worker was what I wanted to do with my life. I applied for the Palliative Care Fellowship. When I was accepted, I knew that this was going to be a year of learning how to make a difference in the lives of seriously ill patients and families.



My field placement was at *CancerCare*, a national organization that provides both financial and counseling services to persons with cancer and their loved ones. During my placement at *CancerCare*, I applied what I learned in my Palliative Social Work course and other social work courses. I learned from my clients about how they and their family experienced their often devastating diagnoses. I developed an understanding of the financial and emotional challenges they faced. I learned how to connect with persons with cancer and their caregivers on the *CancerCare* HopeLine. I became skilled at responding to emergencies and remaining calm under pressure.

Through the Fellowship, I was able to attend the SWPHN Annual Conference in Santa Fe, NM. This was a wonderful opportunity to meet with other students and with experienced palliative social workers and to attend so many interesting and useful presentations. My Career Mentor through the Fellowship was so helpful and provided valuable guidance.

I am looking forward to beginning my post-MSW Fellowship in Palliative Social Work at Mount Sinai-Beth Israel beginning in July.