

# A View from the Middle of My Mid-Career Fellowship

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**S**ince July 2020, I've been engaged as a kind of a guinea pig in a graduate medical education experiment. I am taking part in fellowship training in Hospice and Palliative Medicine at Mount Sinai Hospital on a part-time, competency-based basis. I have not stopped my work as an emergency medicine (EM) physician. I continue to work as a member of the EM faculty, with administrative and teaching responsibilities in this realm.

One week a month, I learn, as a fellow, on service for palliative medicine consults. One afternoon a week, I go to the palliative medicine fellows didactics (virtually). In a few months, I will do some rotations in hospice and outpatient clinics, all the while continuing to do EM shifts, seeing patients, doing bedside teaching of residents, and giving lectures at EM conferences. My fellowship directors monitor my learning closely and will ensure that I achieve the competencies required for board certification. Then they will certify me to take the Hospice and Palliative Medicine subspecialty boards. I've been doing it all through the COVID pandemic, in PPE, while my kids are remote-learning, and my husband works from home.

And it's been fantastic.

I am learning so much. Palliative medicine physicians have advanced communication skills that seemed magical to me only a few years ago. But they're learnable skills and I'm learning them. I have gone from feeling burnout from EM to being reinvigorated in my practice and eager to integrate the two fields, bringing strengths from each to the other. My ability to manage pain and symptoms has improved. I have a new-found appreciation of the scourge of constipation. I am the go-to person in the ED for questions about hospice, legality of surrogate decision-makers, and what a palliative consult might contribute to the patient and family.

It's been hard. I'm busy. But it's a good kind of busy, where I'm engaged more than I am frazzled. It's an adjustment to being a learner. But it's also nice not to be in charge for once. I've been close to a lot of death this year (as we all have). On the palliative care service, that death is still grieved, but it's more expected, there's some emotional cushion.

I'm very fortunate that my hospital system had a well-established palliative medicine fellowship with innovative fellowship directors who were willing to try this experiment. My department at Mount Sinai has been amazingly supportive of this faculty development project. I've got a ways to go before I can practice palliative medicine on my own, but I'm full of ideas and coming up with more possible projects every day.

I no longer feel like I might have to leave medicine. I have things to learn and things to teach. I'm still excited to talk to patients and help them and their families through difficult times, just like I was as a medical student.

There are two other competency-based fellows at University of Pennsylvania (both from Internal Medicine) and another coming to Mount Sinai next year (Family Medicine). Also, there is a program at the University of Colorado part-time for two years and results in an MS in Palliative Medicine. I hope we're the beginning of a movement. There will be so much need for these skills as the population ages.

You may want to learn more about palliative care. There are great resources and courses out there to learn more without necessarily doing a full fellowship and getting board certified. Some are listed below. Come be part of the movement towards advancing palliative care in the emergency department.



## List of Palliative Care Educational Resources for EM Docs

### Center to Advance Palliative Care

Your hospital or hospital system may be a member, which entitles you to membership CME-granting modules on a wide variety of Palliative Care topics  
<https://www.capc.org/>

### Vital Talk

Focused on teaching communication skills (delivering bad news, etc.)  
CME-granting communication courses  
<https://www.vitaltalk.org/>

### EPEC-EM

Education in Palliative and End-of-life Care Based at Northwestern  
CME-granting course focused for EM docs  
<https://www.bioethics.northwestern.edu/programs/epec/curricula/emergency-medicine.html>

### PCEP

Palliative Care Education and Practice At Harvard. Much bigger time commitment (1 week + 6 mo project at home + 1week)  
<https://pallcare.hms.harvard.edu/>

### Fast Facts

Sign up and they will send a weekly article about a pall care topic. They also have an index or prior articles. Short. Easily digestible. From the University of Wisconsin.  
<https://www.mypcnow.org/fast-facts/>

### Pallimed

A medical blog.  
<https://www.pallimed.org/>

### AAHPM

American Academy of Hospice and Palliative Medicine  
<http://aahpm.org/self-study/essentials> ●