

Focus on Faculty #102

Justin Sanders



Dr. Justin Sanders holds the Kappy and Eric M. Flanders Chair of Palliative Care and directs the Division of Palliative Care in the Department of Family Medicine in the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences. On September 1, 2023 he became the director of the Division of Supportive and Palliative Care at the McGill University Health Centre. He is an Associate Professor in the Department of Family Medicine and an Associate Member of the Gerald Bronfman Department of Oncology.

Dr. Sanders is from Park City, Utah. He received a BA in the History of Art from Haverford College in Philadelphia, PA and an MD from the University of Vermont in Burlington, VT. As a US-UK Fulbright Scholar, Dr. Sanders completed an MSc in Medical Anthropology from University College London in the UK. As a resident and chief resident in Family Medicine in the Department of Family and Social Medicine at Montefiore Medical Center in the Bronx, NY, he nurtured an interest in care of the underserved that has been a consistent thread in his academic work.

Having completed the Harvard Interprofessional Palliative Care Fellowship at Massachusetts General Hospital and Dana-Farber Cancer Institute in 2014, Dr. Sanders joined DFCI as a clinical faculty member and Ariadne Labs – a health systems innovation center at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health and the Brigham and Women’s Hospital - as a fellow in cancer communications outcomes research under the mentorship of Dr. Susan Block and Dr. Atul Gawande. As a fellow, he studied the acceptability and impact of structured serious illness conversations among Black Americans. As a faculty member and Associate Director of Innovation, he subsequently helped develop, implement, and study the Serious Illness Care Program in health systems in the US, Canada, Europe, Asia, and Africa. As an Associate Faculty member, he continues to lead projects at Ariadne Labs and to advise health systems and mentor researchers interested in improving serious illness communication and serious illness care equity in several countries.

Having joined the McGill faculty in October 2021, Dr. Sanders still feels like he is getting his feet wet. He remains excited to build relationships with clinicians across the Gerald Bronfman Department of Oncology. Chercheurs-boursiers cliniciens Junior 2 funding from FRQS supporting “A Research Program to Address Psychological Distress and Promote Healing Relationships in Serious Illness” includes numerous opportunities for collaboration in the department. One vehicle for doing so is the Interprofessional McGill Program in Advanced Communication Skills (IMPACS), a program that grew out of a Rossy Cancer Network QI2 grant to assess capacity for culture change in serious illness communication. Working with Dr. Sonia Skamene and others in the Division of Supportive and Palliative Care and the Department of Oncology, IMPACS aims to improve the accessibility and quality of communication skills training across McGill undergraduate, graduate, and professional clinical communities.

Dr. Sanders is passionate about making and consuming coffee, pizza and most other foods and is a novice but enthusiastic runner (to counter the effects). He moved to Montreal with Caroline, his wife of 12 years, and their children Cecily (9) and Willem (6).