

Focus on Faculty #92

Sonia Skamene



Sonia Skamene, MDCM, M.Sc., FRCPC is an Assistant Professor in the Gerald Bronfman Department of Oncology and is a member of its Division of Radiation Oncology. After completing her medical degree at McGill University in 2011, she continued her training at McGill in radiation oncology. She then pursued a fellowship at the Brigham and Women's / Dana Farber Cancer Centre in Supportive and Palliative Radiation Therapy under Dr. Tracy Balboni. She joined the Department of Radiation Oncology at the McGill University Health Centre in 2017, where her clinical focus is on palliative radiotherapy, hematological malignancies, and pediatric cancers.

Inspired by the desire to challenge dogmas in radiation oncology treatment, as well as by one of her mentors, Dr. Carolyn Freeman, Dr. Skamene wished to use a quality improvement (QI) science approach to lead change within the Cedars Cancer Centre. Shortly after starting clinical practice, she undertook and completed a Masters' degree in Healthcare Quality at Queen's University. She currently serves as the chair of the MUHC Radiation Oncology QI Committee and sits on the Cancer Care Mission Quality Improvement Committee. She will be co-leading a new subcommittee on building capacity for QI within the cancer care mission with the hope of improving QI culture. A dedicated teacher, she has led the Multidisciplinary Oncology Quality Improvement Curriculum for residents and fellows since 2018 and strives to inspire trainees to see opportunities for improvement in all aspects of their lives and practice. She began a new challenge in the fall of 2022 as course director of ONCO 625 - Quality Improvement Principles and Methods, a new graduate course in the Gerald Bronfman Department of Oncology.

Dr. Skamene strives to improve the care of patients with advanced malignancy and is currently working with her division director, Dr. Hijal, as well as several members of the Division of Radiation Oncology, to develop a dedicated palliative radiotherapy service to streamline care and

improve care quality to both inpatients and outpatients needing supportive radiotherapy. She also participates on the Canadian Association of Radiation Oncology's Supportive Care Committee and the Canadian Palliative Radiation Oncology Group. Dr. Skamene believes strongly in the power of effective communication around serious illness, and has undertaken communications training through VitalTalk, a program using evidence-based methodologies to teach clinicians skills in delivering serious news and discussing goals of care. Inspired by this program, she completed VitalTalk faculty training to be able to teach these skills to other faculty and learners. She is excited to be working with Dr. Justin Sanders, Kappy and Eric M. Flanders Chair of Palliative Care, and a dedicated team to develop a structured approach to communications skills training and culture change at McGill.

When she is not at the hospital or working on preparing lectures and meeting minutes, she can be found, often along with her husband, running after her 2- and 4-year-old children and looking for creative ways to feed and entertain them.