



# THE FORUM

September/October 2022 • Volume 21, No. 5 • The Official Magazine of Collier County Medical Society



## Dr. Rebecca Smith Installed as 65th CCMS President



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## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Register at [www.ccmsonline.org](http://www.ccmsonline.org) or call (239) 435-7727

Saturday, September 24, 8:00am  
**Foundation of CCMS Docs & Duffers  
 Charity Golf Tournament**  
 Bonita Bay Club Naples  
*Support opportunities at [ccmsonline.org](http://ccmsonline.org)*

Thursday, September 29, 6pm  
**CCMS Women Physicians Social**  
 Seasons 52

Thursday, October 6, 6:30pm  
**CCMS Networking Dinner for  
 Resident/Fellow Physicians & Hiring Physicians**  
 Brio Italian Grille

Tuesday, October 11, 7:45am  
**CCMS Practice Administrators Seminar - Cyber Security**  
 Porter Wright

Thursday, November 10, 5:30pm  
**CCMS After 5 Social**  
 Lamoraga

Saturday, November 19, 5:30pm  
**CCMS & CCMSA Family Golf Night**  
 Topgolf Fort Myers

Friday, December 9, 6:30-9:00pm  
**CCMS New Members Welcome Reception**  
 Neighborhood Health Clinic,  
 Van Domelen Education and Wellness Building  
*Support opportunities at [ccmsonline.org](http://ccmsonline.org)*

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Michael Smith, CPA • 239-325-2458  
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[oascms.com](http://oascms.com)

### CCMS Member Dues

**The 2023 CCMS dues deadline is Dec. 31, 2022.**  
 Members (or their groups) can pay online today at [ccmsonline.org/membership](http://ccmsonline.org/membership). Invoices will also be mailed directly to members who pay individually, or to practice administrators for group payment. Thank you for renewing!

## CCMS Board of Directors 2021-2022

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Rebecca Smith, M.D.

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 Gary Swain, M.D.

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 Glenn Groat, M.D., Alexandra Grace, D.O.

Ex Officio Directors: April Donahue, Executive Director, CCMS; CCMS Alliance Board Liaison and Michael Witte, D.O., Resident Physician Representative

Views and opinions expressed in The Forum are those of the authors and are not necessarily those of the Collier County Medical Society's Board of Directors, staff or advertisers. Copy deadline for editorial and advertising submission is the 15th of the month preceding publication. The editorial staff of The Forum reserves the right to edit or reject any submission.

# MEMBER NEWS

## New Members:



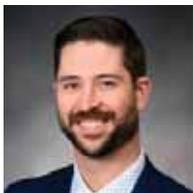
**Andrew M Bonett, MD**  
Plastic Surgery  
Naples Plastic Surgery  
1250 Pine Ridge Rd Ste 101C  
Naples, FL 34108  
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**Sergio A Dromi, MD**  
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ProScan / NCH Imaging  
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Naples, FL 34110  
Phone: (239) 624-6660 Fax: (239) 624-6661



**Paul L Hurd, MD**  
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2338 Immokalee Rd Ste 203  
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**Benjamin D Lehmkuhl, DO**  
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Florida Gulf Coast Ear Nose & Throat  
9250 Corkscrew Rd Ste #3  
Estero, FL 33928  
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**David C Lobb, MD**  
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Pediatrix Medical Group of Florida Inc  
12640 Creekside Ln  
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**Todd A Pezzi, MD**  
Radiation Oncology  
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**Noeli K Pinelo Nicholson, MD**  
Family Medicine  
Hobdari Family Health  
1855 Veterans Park Dr Ste 201  
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**Benjamin A Schnee, DO**  
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Naples Orthopedics  
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**Liuba Soldatova, MD**  
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**Robert D Swift, DO**  
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**Gary A Webb, MD**  
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DocPlusMe  
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**Bryan L Witt, DO**  
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2171 Pine Ridge Rd Ste F  
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**Ashley N Wood, MD**  
Radiology  
Proscan / NCH Imaging  
1715 Medical Blvd  
Naples, FL 34110  
Phone: (239) 624-6660 Fax: (239) 624-6661

## Reinstated Members:



**Robert G Chami, MD**  
Plastic Surgery  
Riverchase Dermatology  
11181 Healthpark Blvd Ste 2280  
Naples, FL 34110  
Phone: (239) 594-9075 Fax: (239) 262-8730

## A Message from the New CCMS President

Rebecca Smith, M.D.



I'd first like to recognize our executive team, April Donahue, our Executive Director, and Nancy Wood, Executive Assistant, for their ongoing assistance and loyalty that makes our CCMS function effectively and smoothly. April has been with CCMS for the past 9 years. She has served as the Chair of the Conference of Florida Medical Society Executives and is currently on the board of the American Association of Medical

Society Executives. This is an honor and a tribute to her leadership skills. We are fortunate to have both, April and Nancy, working for us on a daily basis.

Nancy Wood is celebrating her 10-year anniversary with CCMS and I'd like to take this time to acknowledge her dedication and service. Thank you for all your hard work.

Thank you, CCMS members for your vote of confidence.

We are living during challenging times. Change and uncertainty are often our new "norm". Physicians are known to dislike uncertainty. We want to know who, what, when, where, diagnosis, prognosis, and treatment options. The unknown can be unsettling.

For me, as the incoming president of CCMS, I have the uncertainty of not knowing what challenges for CCMS lie ahead in the coming year. When I reflect on the recent past challenges, I am in awe that our past presidents, board members, and membership were able to meet the challenges head on, working together. This gives me reassurance.

What we do have with CCMS is certainty. There is certainty that we have an organization that is looking out for your needs as a physician, whatever the challenge. We are here for you and our profession. We look forward to more networking events, resuming our normal schedule with education, wellness activities, fundraisers, and political action. I'd like to promote more discussions to establish priorities and strategies to follow, so we can best advocate for concerns that are important to you and our community. These include scope of practice, legislation, governmental regulations, and the unique needs that we physicians and our patients have in Collier County.

I encourage you to get involved in committees if you have the time, encourage your colleagues to join CCMS if they are not members, continue your participation in our events because they do promote camaraderie, your practices, education, and well-being.

Consider joining the Florida Medical Association if you are not a member. We currently have seven delegates who will be attending the FMA meeting this coming August. The number of delegates is based on Collier County membership in the FMA. If all our members of the CCMS were members of FMA, we would have 14 delegates attending. The delegates represent

you and our Collier County. With more delegates in the House of Medicine, we would be even more effective in influencing medical decisions that affect our county and state.

I have a number of "thank yous" to make:

First, to our executive team, April and Nancy, for their ongoing service to CCMS and making our 65th Anniversary Installation of Officers meeting happen.

2. To Dr. Perez-Trepichio for his year of leadership as our President,

3. to the current board of directors and committee members for your dedication,

3. to Arthrex for a wonderful location to have our dinner,

4. to our presenters this evening for sharing their insights and expertise,

5. to my colleagues who make it a pleasure to come to work everyday,

6. and a special thanks to my family and friends for your support, love, and encouragement.

Let's continue to advocate for one another, be role models for our peers and staff and stay strong as an organization.

## A Message from the Outgoing CCMS President

Alejandro Perez-Trepichio, M.D.



I personally believe that the importance of our society resides in your membership and participation so we can better defend and advocate for our profession in these very difficult times.

Ultimately, our goal should be that we at the local, state, and national level can continue to provide compassionate care, while achieving the best possible outcomes for our patients.

My journey with CCMS first as a delegate to the FMA and later as part of the board started around 2014, and every step along the way the camaraderie, exchange of ideas and call to action has been a fantastic learning experience that I will forever cherish.

None of this would have been possible without the insight, wisdom, and support of my colleagues not only in the present board, our Executive Director April Donahue as well as Executive Assistant Nancy Wood, but also many of you, my CCMS member colleagues.

I want to specially recognize my wife Patty for her unwavering support not only in my professional endeavors, but so much more....

It has been an honor and a privilege to have served as your 64th CCMS president. THANK YOU!

*If what you believe to be true about money turned out not to be true, when would you like to know?*



(back) Evan Slepceвич; Bill Slepceвич, ChFC, CLU; Will Slepceвич  
(seated) Kim Slepceвич and Diane Linkenberg

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## CCMS Honors Leaders at the 2022 CCMS Annual Meeting

*Congratulations to new President & Board of Directors, and CCMS Physician of the Year*

Approximately 175 members and guests enjoyed networking and recognizing their colleagues at the Medical Society's 65th Annual Meeting, July 16th at Arthrex One Conference Center. Dr. Alejandro Perez-Trepichio, outgoing president passed the gavel to Dr. Rebecca Smith, who began her one-year term as the 65th CCMS board president; the 2022-23 board of directors took office; and CCMS awarded Dr. Catherine Kowal the 2022 CCMS Physician of the Year.



### **Catherine N. Kowal, M.D.** **2022 Physician of the Year**

Dr. Kowal is a rheumatologist in North Naples and part of American Arthritis and Rheumatology Associates. Dr. Kowal served on the CCMS board 2012-2018, including President, has served on the CCMS PAC board since 2013 and the Foundation of CCMS board since 2015, has been a delegate to the FMA since 2013

with CCMS and the Florida Society of Rheumatology, and has been the Specialty Section Representative on the FMA Board of Directors since 2020. She has chaired the CCMS Women's Health Forum Committee since 2009, is a founding member of the CCMS Physician Wellness Committee, and served as a past editor of the CCMS magazine *The Forum*. Dr. Kowal and her husband, radiologist Dr. Ray Montecalvo, have lived in Naples for 30 years.



### **Rebecca G. Smith, M.D.** **President**

NCH Physician Group-Palliative Care

Phone: (239) 624-8490

Dr. Smith is the interim medical director of the Brookdale Center for Healthy Aging and Rehabilitation, staff physician at the Patty Baker Outpatient Palliative Care and Inpatient Palliative programs of NCH

Healthcare System. She earned her BS in Biology and MS in Physiology from The Pennsylvania State University, and MD from St. George's University School of Medicine.

Dr. Smith began her internship in Internal Medicine and residency in Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation (PM&R) at Louisiana State University Medical Center, completed at Temple University Hospital. She completed a Pain Medicine fellowship at Harvard Medical School and is Board Certified in PM&R, Hospice & Palliative Care Medicine, and Pain Medicine. She has co-authored peer-reviewed publications and teaches at St. George's School of Medicine.

### **2022-23 CCMS Board of Directors:**



### **Gary D. Swain, M.D.** **Vice President**

NCH Physician Group

Phone: (239) 624-0340

Dr. Swain attended medical school at the University of Nevada School of Medicine where he was elected to Alpha Omega Alpha. He completed his residency in family

medicine at David Grant USAF Medical Center at Travis Air Force Base. Following his residency, he was stationed in Italy where he was Chief of Clinical Services at the San Vito Air Station. He then returned to a faculty position at the Travis AFB residency program prior to retiring as a Lt Colonel. He practiced in Decatur, Texas in a solo practice prior to moving to Naples to accept a position with NCH Physician Group.



### **Zubin Pachori, M.D.** **Treasurer**

Premier Inpatient Partners

Phone: (239) 330-2933

Dr. Pachori is a Hospital Medicine Physician, practicing in Collier County since 2012. He was raised in Florida and is a graduate of Florida Atlantic University.

He received his medical degree from Ross University School of Medicine, and completed his residency at Stamford Hospital/ Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons Program in Family Medicine. He is one of the founders of Premier Inpatient Partners, and has been involved with several hospital committees. At home he enjoys spending time with his two sons and his wife.



### **George Brinnig, M.D.** **Secretary**

Center for Sight

Phone: (239) 261-8383

Dr. Brinnig continues his 30-year career as a general ophthalmologist. He has practiced in numerous settings including solo practice in California, large group in

Massachusetts, and single specialty group in Connecticut. He has served in several organized medicine venues including governing boards of the California Medical Association, Stanislaus County Medical Society (also as President and CEO), and New Haven County Medical Society. His BS is from SUNY Albany, PhD from UC Berkeley, MD from UC Berkeley, and MMM from Carnegie Mellon. He enjoys inventing, foreign language, and travel.

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**Alejandro D. Perez-Trepichio, M.D.**  
**Immediate Past President**

Millennium Physician Group  
 Phone: (239) 249-7800

Born in Argentina, Dr. Perez-Trepichio is a graduate of the National University of La Plata in Buenos Aires. He pursued a research career at Cleveland Clinic Foundation, where he received grants from the National Institutes of Health as co-investigator and published several articles in peer-reviewed journals. He completed his Internal Medicine residency at Cleveland Clinic and relocated to Naples where he practices at Millennium Physician Group. In 2009 he was appointed a member of Millennium Physician Group's physician leadership and currently serves as Chief Medical Officer. He was elected to the CCMS board in 2016 and has represented CCMS as an FMA delegate from 2014-2022. He is a board member of the PHO/Southwest Florida Physicians Association and Neighborhood Health Clinic.



**Jose M. Baez, M.D.**  
**Officer / Director at Large**

Jose M Baez, MD, LLC  
 Phone: (239) 777-0663

Dr. Baez is a board-certified internist with a private practice in North Naples. He attended medical school at Mount Sinai School of Medicine and completed his Internal Medicine residency at Bronx Lebanon Hospital Center. While in private practice in Connecticut, he was Assistant Clinical Professor at University of Connecticut's School of Medicine. Dr. Baez has served on numerous hospital committees and medical association boards. For the past few years, he has chaired the CCMS Membership Committee and served as a delegate to the FMA. Dr. Baez has completed 7 New York City Marathons and a Chicago Marathon.



**Glenn E. Groat, M.D.**  
**Director at Large**

Radiology Regional  
 Phone: (239) 430-1400

Dr. Groat received his undergraduate degree in Kinesiology and Psychology from the University of Colorado at Boulder and his medical degree from the SUNY Upstate Medical University. He completed his internship at the Mary Imogene Bassett Hospital for Diagnostic Radiology and residency in Radiology at SUNY Upstate Medical University. Dr. Groat then went on to complete a Fellowship in Body Imaging and Intervention Radiology at the Cedars Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles. Dr. Groat is board certified by the American Board of Radiology and is a member of the Radiological Society of North America, as well as the American College of Radiology.



**Alexandra R. Grace, D.O.**  
**Director at Large**

Gastroenterology Specialists of SW Florida  
 Phone: (239) 593-6201

Dr. Grace received her BS in Psychobiology at University of Miami. She went on to complete both a doctor of osteopathic and masters in public health at Nova Southeastern University. She completed her residency in internal medicine at Mount Sinai Medical Center followed by gastroenterology fellowship at St John Macomb Oakland in Michigan. She is dual boarded in internal medicine and gastroenterology. Dr. Grace has practiced at Physicians Regional for the last 7 years and will be transitioning into private gastroenterology practice this summer locally. She has held the position of chief of medicine at Physicians Regional since 2018. She has been a member of CCMS for 7 years and become more involved as nominating chair in 2021 and FMA delegate.

***Ex-officio Board Members:***



**Michael Witte, D.O.**



**Michael Schoeller, D.O.**

**Resident Physician Representatives**  
 NCH Graduate Medical Education  
 (239) 624-0030



**April Donahue**  
**Exec. Director**  
 (239) 435-7727

***CCMS Alliance Board:***

colliercountymrsa@gmail.com  
 fb.com/CollierCountyMedicalSocietyAlliance

Barbara Rougraff  
 Chrissy Winzenreid  
 Amy Howard  
 Karen Swain

Sheryl Guttman  
 Marisol Baez  
 Serena Josephson  
 Candice Marquina

***2022 FMA Alternate Delegates for CCMS:***



**Erik D. Hiester, D.O.**  
 NCH Physician  
 Group-Concierge  
 (239) 624-8800



**Rafael C. Haciski, M.D.**  
 Advanced Gynecology Inc  
 (239) 692-9699

# CCMS Delegation Represents Collier Physicians at FMA Annual Meeting

Collier County Medical Society



CCMS members participating as delegates to the Florida Medical Association represented their colleagues at the 202 FMA Annual Meeting and House of Delegates, August 5-6 in Orlando. The CCMS

delegation consisted of CCMS president and delegation chair Dr. Rebecca Smith, and delegates Dr. George Brinnig, Dr. Alexandra Grace, Dr. Glenn Groat, Dr. Rafael Haciski, Dr. Zubin Pachori, and Dr. Gary Swain, and alternate delegate Dr. Erik Hiester. CCMS members who participated on other delegations included Dr. Jose Baez, Dr. Rebekah Bernard, Dr. Corey Howard, and Dr. Catherine Kowal, and CCMS Alliance Board Member Karen Swain served as the FMA Alliance delegate. During the FMA Annual Meeting, Dr. Haciski was re-elected as a FMA alternate delegate to the to the American Medical Association. Dr. Bernard continues to serve on the FMA Board of Governors, and Dr. Howard continues to chair the AMA delegation.

To help increase the CCMS delegation allotment to the FMA and represent Collier County physicians and patients, CCMS members are encouraged to join the FMA. If every CCMS member joined the FMA, the Society's delegation could double, strengthening our voice at the FMA House of Delegates. Members are also encouraged to contribute to the FMA and CCMS political action committees to help support physician and patient friendly candidates for state and local offices. Visit [ccmsonline.org/membership](http://ccmsonline.org/membership) for a link to the FMA membership information and CCMS PAC dues.

Prior to the meeting, FMA delegates from across the state submitted testimony online on various resolutions and FMA Board of Governors reports proposed to the House of Delegates, and then offered additional testimony at onsite reference committees. Then on Sunday of the Annual Meeting, reference committees presented recommendations that were up for debate by the full House of Delegates. Read on for details of some of the House's noteworthy actions. When the FMA issues a final report, CCMS will share the full report in an upcoming issue of the CCMS e-newsletter.

**Resolution 22-108, Promoting, Supporting Clinical Research**, submitted by CCMS was referred to the FMA Board of Governors for study and report back. The resolution called for FMA support of local physicians who are conducting clinical research and helping them educate the community on the benefits of clinical research.

**Resolution 21-109, Kratom Risk and Safety**, a carry-over from 2021, adopted with substitute language. Support legislative and/or regulatory efforts prohibiting the sale or distribution of Kratom in Florida, while still allowing opportunity for proper scientific research.

**Resolution 22-109, Elder Abuse in Florida**, adopted. Work with the state to improve elder abuse investigations and standardize documentation and referral triggers in EHRs, and the FMA will develop advocacy strategies for further strengthening laws to further protect Florida's elderly.

**Resolution 22-110, Physician Online Ratings**, adopted. Create a training course for physicians that would provide guidance on how to effectively respond to negative online reviews without violating HIPAA guidelines and give physicians tools to address such matters.

**RESOLUTION 22-112, Freedom to Practice Evidence-Based Medicine substitute language/title**, adopted. Oppose any legislation that would create criminal penalties, a civil cause of action, or result in administrative action against the license of a Florida physician when the physician is practicing evidence-based medicine which is consistent with the appropriate specialty society guidelines.

**Resolution 22-208, Prior Authorization and other Advocacy Support of Opinions of the AMA, FMA and County Medical Societies**, adopted as amended. Join other State Medical Societies and the AMA to support and publicize the Valentini et al v. Group Health Inc. case about prior authorization by providing an opinion and or by publicly declaring that insurers and their medical directors/other decision makers have duty for care if denying or delaying payments for ordered services, and should be medically liable for downstream consequences of their decisions and for costs to patients and their physicians. Study the outcome of this case report back to members.

**Resolution 22-302, Expanding the Use of Narcan**, adopted as amended. Support legislation that increases use and availability of opioid antagonists, including naloxone in Florida communities, and promotes the development and implementation of opioid antagonists, including naloxone as a community-based intervention to prevent lethal opioid overdose.

**Resolution 22-304, Public Availability of Pregnancy-Related Care**, substitute language adopted. Oppose legislation that would pursue criminal charges against physicians who provide medically appropriate termination of pregnancy, and oppose any future legislation hindering or blocking the availability of FDA-approved treatments for pharmacological termination of pregnancy, regardless of whether used for termination or other unrelated indications, when this is a matter between the physician and patient.

**Resolution 22-308, Employed Physician Non-Compete Contracts**, adopted as amended. Support legislation that non-compete clauses should not be allowed in employed physician contracts when the employing entity is not physician owned and operated and has over 30 employed physicians and the employer has no standard mechanism for future proportional equity partnership within the organization.

**Resolution 22-309, Corporate Practice of Medicine**, substitute language adopted. Support legislation that would ensure that all employed Florida-licensed physicians retain independent medical judgment in providing care to patients, and that employers may not unreasonably interfere with, control, or otherwise direct the professional judgment of an employed physician; and assist employed physicians who have

continued from page 8



had the exercise of their professional judgment improperly interfered with by their employer obtain an appropriate remedy.

**Resolution 22-311, Dedicated On-Site Physician Requirement for Emergency Departments**, adopted as amended. Support legislation or regulation requiring that all facilities in the state of Florida that bear the designation of Emergency Department, ED, Emergency Room, ER, or other title, facility logo or design implying provision of emergency medical care must have the real-time, on-site presence of, and supervision of non-physician practitioners, by a licensed physician with training and experience in emergency medical care, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week; and advocate for similar legislation at a federal level with the American Medical Association.

**Resolution 22-314, Opposition to License Free Gun Carry**, substitute language adopted. Support the current requirements to obtain a concealed weapon or firearm license.

**Resolution 22-401, Preventing EHR Refill Errors**, substitute language adopted. Study and report on electronic refill errors which are created by problems with poor EHR functionality and pharmacy business practices; and share the findings of this report with stakeholders whom the FMA deems appropriate in order to effectuate policies that protect patients and physicians from preventable medical errors.

**Resolution 22-402, Formation of Unions**, substitute language adopted. Form a subcommittee to explore and facilitate the formation of unions where appropriate.

**Resolution 22-403, Strategy for Proactive Tort Reform Relief**, adopted. Create a task force with interested stakeholders to review the feasibility of filing legislation that would enact meaningful tort reform including: reinstating caps on non-economic damages; jury notification of settlements reached by other defendants; and a revision of the formula used to extrapolate future medical care that elevates monetary awards.

**Resolution 22-408, Physicians for the Protection of Private Information**, adopted. Make a request to the AMA to make participation in the Data Restriction Program more transparent as well as clarify the “Do not Release Policy” and “The No Contract Status” making them easier to work with and opt out of; and the FMA will educate physicians on the AMA’s Masterfile via an article published through one of their newsletters. This article should include information on how their private information is used and how to opt out of this system via the Data Restriction Program if they are inclined to do so.



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Grab your FREE gift from us at the Annual Docs & Duffers Charity Golf Tournament on Saturday, September 24<sup>th</sup> at Bonita Bay Club.

# Foundation of CCMS Announces 2022 Healthcare Scholarship Winners

*Awards support Florida residents who are pursuing careers in healthcare*



The board of directors of the Foundation of Collier County Medical Society (CCMS) is pleased to announce the winners of its 2022 Foundation Healthcare Scholarship awards: Aline Dort, Rebecca Henkind, Juliana Pena Lopez, and Emma Stock. Each student will receive a scholarship ranging from \$2,000 to \$5,000.

The final tally of 2022 scholarship awards given by the Foundation is over \$24,500, which also includes the \$12,500 award given to Yordan Urrutia, recipient of the Foundation's 2022 Dr. William Lascheid Memorial Scholarship for Medical Students, announced in June.

The Foundation of CCMS healthcare scholarships are for students who are Florida residents enrolled or accepted into a healthcare degree program, with awards based on need, academic performance, and community involvement.

"The Foundation selected these scholarship winners from a pool of highly distinguished healthcare students," said Dr. Rolando Rivera, Foundation Chair. "Our scholarships are made possible by generous Foundation donors and sponsors whose contributions have given us the opportunity to provide financial aid to our future medical professionals."



Ms. Dort is an Immokalee High School graduate, and recently graduated with a master's degree (M.S.) in Clinical Mental Health Counseling and Specialist Degree (Ed.S.) from Florida State University. "I am grateful to have been given the opportunity to share my life's story and it has motivated me to work even harder in achieving my goals, dreams, and aspirations. Thank you for being a part of my journey towards becoming a licensed mental health counselor!"



Ms. Henkind is a Community School of Naples graduate, and a medical student at the University of Colorado School of Medicine, class of 2024. "As I have gained more experience in the medical field, I have become increasingly passionate about healthcare equity. The generosity of the Foundation of CCMS has alleviated some of the financial burden of pursuing an advanced degree and will enable me to further pursue my public health interests in the future."



Ms. Pena Lopez is a Cape Coral High School graduate, and a medical student at the University of Florida College of Medicine, class of 2026. "The path to a career in medicine has many challenges. However, these are greatly alleviated by generous organizations like yours. As an aspiring physician, it is my main goal to advocate for underserved communities in Florida and work towards alleviating health disparities and reaching health equity."



Ms. Stock is a Lakewood Ranch High School graduate, and in the Physical Therapy program at Florida Gulf Coast University, class of 2024. "This award has not only helped me, but also my future patients. I cannot express my gratitude enough and will happily accept the scholarship. I am honored and appreciate the Foundation and your help in supporting my professional journey."

The Foundation is a 501(c)3 charitable organization launched by the Collier County Medical Society in 2012, with the mission to provide support and leadership to programs that address access to healthcare and promote health education. The Foundation's signature fundraiser, the Docs & Duffers Golf Tournament on September 24, 2022 will help raise funds for its scholarship program and local healthcare programs in need.

Applications for the 2023 Dr. William Lascheid Memorial Scholarship for medical students, and the Foundation healthcare scholarships for students in healthcare degree programs, will be available online in December 2022. Applications are due March 31st of each year. More information on supporting the Foundation and its scholarships is available at [ccmsfoundation.org](http://ccmsfoundation.org).



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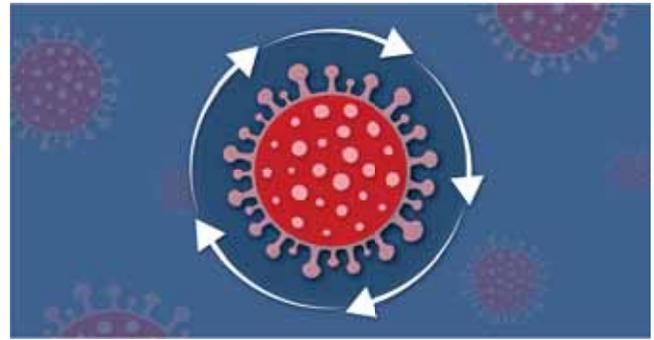
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## What We Owe Long COVID Patients

Dr. Zijian Chen, Assistant Professor of Medicine at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, and Peter A. Kolbert, Senior Vice President of Claim and Litigation services for Healthcare Risk Advisors, part of TDC Group

When Gov. Andrew Cuomo shut down New York City in March 2020, we knew little about treating COVID-19. While treatment has improved considerably, most dialogue has focused on two types of patients—those with severe, even lethal illness, and those with milder symptoms. Yet there is a third category of patients: those suffering from long COVID, whose symptoms linger for an extended period or mysteriously reappear months after their original infection.



Clinicians recognized the existence of these long COVID patients early in the pandemic. May 13, 2022 marked the two-year anniversary of the opening of the Mount Sinai Center for Post-COVID Care in New York City, a first-of-its-kind unit in the U.S. Since then, long COVID has emerged as one of the biggest but least-addressed medical concerns. Anywhere from 10% to 30%<sup>1</sup> of those who contracted COVID-19 suffer chronic aftereffects, some lasting many months after the initial diagnosis. These patients face increased risk<sup>2</sup> of thromboembolic disease, cardiovascular complications, hepatic and renal impairment, and systemic inflammatory response syndrome.

While most of the U.S. has returned to “normal” (or at least a new version of it), these long COVID sufferers, through no fault of their own, have been left behind. They may have avoided the most serious outcomes of COVID-19 initially but are missing out on the return to life as they knew it. And while these patients struggle, so do their health-care providers—many of whom suffer from long COVID themselves after fighting on the front line as intensive care units and morgues exceeded capacity.

Long COVID presents varying and unpredictable symptoms and has no known cure, so with very little information, health-care providers are facing an uphill battle when it comes to providing adequate care to these patients. The absence of a standard set of interventions leaves caregivers vulnerable to liability risks stemming from misdiagnoses—either by not recognizing that the patient has long COVID or by diagnosing long COVID when, in fact, the patient has another serious disease. Medical errors do happen; in fact, diagnostic error is the No. 1 cause of serious harm,<sup>3</sup> making it the top concern for preventing patient injury. In light of these findings, patients need to present clinicians with the full range of symptoms and ask for comprehensive diagnostic tests to be run in order to identify if it's long COVID or another ailment.

In return, health-care providers need to bring experts from varying fields together. Forming a strong multidisciplinary care team, communicating clearly and often with patients, keeping detailed chart notes, conducting exploratory testing, following up frequently with the patient and proactively referring to specialists are all essential elements of effective long COVID care.

If a patient suspects they suffer from long COVID or presents a variety of symptoms after having COVID-19, their assembled care team—which often starts at the office of their primary care provider—should first rule out a separate underlying illness.

Health-care professionals need to find a balance whereby they maintain, when appropriate, a high index of suspicion for long COVID, without letting long COVID become a catchall diagnosis. Knowing that long COVID can present as more than 200 symptoms<sup>4</sup> affecting 10 organ systems, health-care providers find it challenging to pinpoint which ailments, if any, were a direct result of COVID-19. With so many individual symptoms, patients may see a range of specialists, calling for a high degree of collaboration between providers.

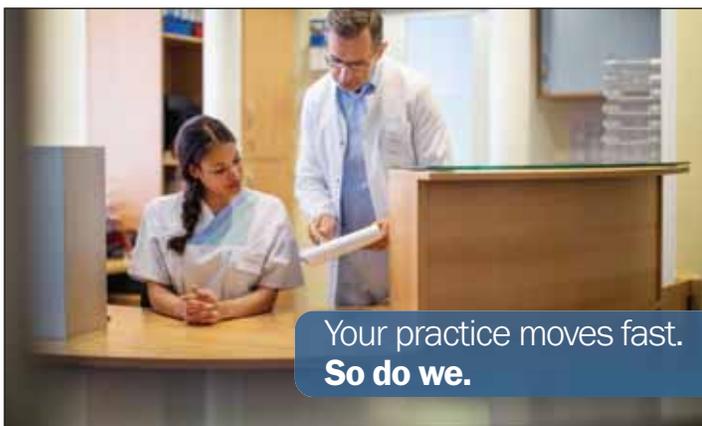
That there are other ailments masquerading as long COVID emphasizes the importance of seeing patients quickly and providing a thorough evaluation. Common long COVID symptoms like chest pain and heart palpitations could also be the presentation of some other, more emergent condition. As frustrating and debilitating as long COVID can be, it can mask worse diseases that might lead to costlier medical bills and a more rapid decline in a patient's health—as well as a higher chance for litigation against physicians if these diagnoses are missed.

When signs of long COVID emerged in the summer of 2020, many doctors were skeptical. Even now—two years later—skeptics remain. Consequently, many patients feel that medical professionals are failing them. In the early 1990s, given limited research, some health-care providers did not yet believe that chronic Lyme was a real disease. Similar doubts have been expressed about long COVID. When health-care providers struggle with doubts about long COVID, they should remember that COVID-19 can result in something other than short-term symptoms or death. There's another scenario—a third category of COVID-19 patients—and we need to accept that reality.

1. <https://www.ama-assn.org/delivering-care/public-health/what-doctors-wish-patients-knew-about-long-covid>
2. <https://reports.mountsinai.org/article/endo2021-01-Mount-Sinai-Center-for-Post-Covid-Care>
3. <https://www.improvediagnosis.org/improvedx-september-2019/new-research-showcases-the-extent-of-diagnostic-error-harm>
4. [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/eclinm/article/PIIS2589-5370\(21\)00299-6/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/eclinm/article/PIIS2589-5370(21)00299-6/fulltext)

This work first appeared in The New York Daily News and online at [www.nydailynews.com](http://www.nydailynews.com).

*The guidelines suggested here are not rules, do not constitute legal advice, and do not ensure a successful outcome. The ultimate decision regarding the appropriateness of any treatment must be made by each healthcare provider considering the circumstances of the individual situation and in accordance with the laws of the jurisdiction in which the care is rendered.*



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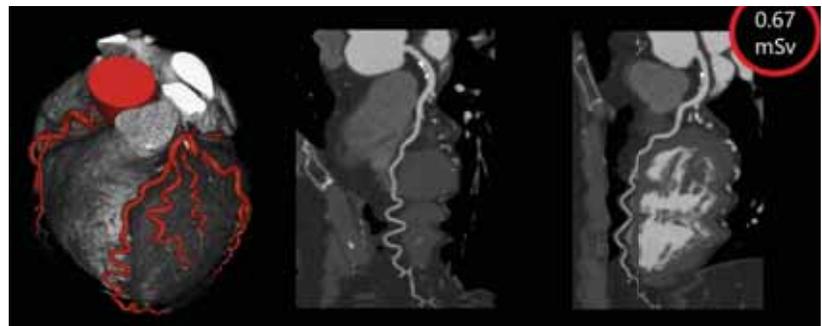
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