

The Mayday Fund Annual Report 2017

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Research, Networking and Continued Interest in Being Nimble

2017 was a challenging year and a complicated one for the fields of pain medicine and care. There were exciting discoveries in the search for biomarkers that provide objective indicators for pain, and in research supporting complementary and alternative treatments for painful conditions. There also was increasing evidence that patient self-management strategies are meaningful tools in care and for maintaining quality of life for those whose suffering is unrelenting.

Among the major developments of the year, the National Institutes of Health released the *Federal Pain Research Strategy (FPRS)*, a long-term strategic plan to advance the federal pain research agenda. It identifies critical gaps in the knowledge and science of pain and maps where research efforts might be effectively targeted. It includes an agenda for developing physiological, behavioral, psychological, outcomes, and health services research.

The *FPRS* follows on the 2016 release of the *National Pain Strategy* and will guide federal research planning and funding decisions. For the fields of pain medicine and care, these documents provide direction on where the developments in the field are likely to lie, as well as provide a template to identify where there may be gaps that a nimble approach to grantmaking might help close.

As The Mayday Fund has sought to ‘close the gap between knowledge and practice,’ these initiatives will help us to refine our grantmaking so as to contribute creatively to both research and clinical care.

What has been particularly encouraging about how pain has been addressed in the last year is that there is now increasing awareness and commitment to studying care across the life span. From birth to the aging, basic and clinical research is now addressing how age is a critical variable in study design and bedside care. Also, it is now firmly established that gender, sex, and ethnic differences are important factors to be taken into account. The promises of a ‘precision medicine’ approach to care will likely yield further refinement in finding solutions to specific pain conditions and syndromes. As a result, the ‘biopsychosocial’ model of care seems increasingly more real.

These developments occurred against the backdrop that the national conversation about pain was dominated by the tragedy of the ‘Opioid Epidemic’ and the dilemma that there are not yet sufficient tools or strategies available to address the burden that chronic pain poses for millions of persons. The multitude of lives lost to addiction makes the challenge of finding better ways to treat pain more real and more urgent.

In light of how the ‘Opioid Epidemic’ has changed the discourse about pain, part of the challenge to The Mayday Fund, for grantmaking in 2018 and future years, will be how to help assure that the public is well informed about pain and the evidence-based tools that treat it. Cognizant of this, in 2017 The Mayday Fund re-launched its Media & Society Fellows Program. Twelve new Fellows will receive communications training and will join the 60 past Mayday Fellows in providing a resource for trustworthy communication about pain and its consequences.

As we review our grantmaking for 2017, we are pleased to have supported both basic and clinical research and to have contributed to various programs that support future leaders, helping to build the

ranks of those who will dedicate their careers to studying and treating pain. We also have pursued our grantmaking goal to build networks so that researchers and clinicians might better coordinate their efforts. And, true to our challenge to ourselves to be nimble in our grantmaking, we have spurred interest in the use of Virtual Reality tools to address painful conditions and have supported a film on migraine that premiered at the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

The Mayday Fund continues to respect its mission to alleviate the incidence, degree and consequence of human physical pain. Over the years our grantmaking targets have evolved, yet the original course we set has continued. The progress being made in the pain field is impressive, as is the dedication of our grantees who continue to search for new and better strategies to understand and treat pain. Our goal has been to make a meaningful contribution. We hope the grants made will achieve this.

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