



Raising Disability Awareness

Employee Reflections



Bonnie S. Schwartz, MS, RHIA

Quality Improvement Research Analyst, The Collaborative Endocrine Surgery Quality Improvement Program (CESQIP), The Metabolic and Bariatric Surgery Accreditation, Quality Improvement Program (MBSAQIP), The Mount Sinai Hospital

Bonnie Schwartz analyzes data to find opportunities to improve patient outcomes after surgery. Bonnie, who is deaf, is a strong advocate for disability awareness. She is aware that people may be uncomfortable interacting with deaf individuals, but sees this as an opportunity to educate people on effective communication and interaction. Bonnie overcame adversities as a child due to her disability and believes people with disabilities have the agency to do and be whatever they want. She attributes this victory to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), but notes there's still work to be done. Bonnie hopes through education, we will break the stigma attached to disabilities and create equitable spaces for all.

Arianny Ramirez

Clinical Research Coordinator, Spinal Cord Injury Program, Rehabilitation and Human Performance, The Mount Sinai Hospital /Mount Sinai Queens

Arianny Ramirez conducts research on longitudinal studies for spinal cord injury health. Though she was not born with a disability, she has since formed a different perspective and deeper connection to her work since experiencing a spinal cord injury at the age of 18. Arianny hopes through sharing her story, she can be a role model to those learning to live with a disability and show others that there is life after a disability. Through her research, she hopes to improve the quality of life for people with disabilities. She believes people with disabilities should be at the forefront of addressing issues to advance equity, rather than others speaking on their behalf.



Shawn Lee

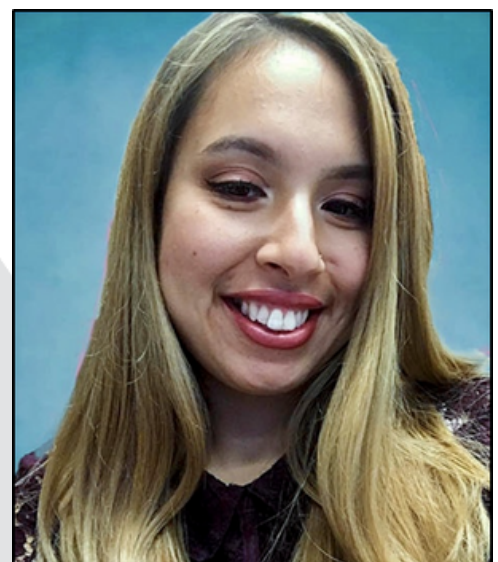
Associate Director of Operations, Faculty Practice Associates, Central Billing Office, Mount Sinai Health System

Shawn Lee, a diversity, equity, and inclusion champion, is involved in system-wide efforts to create an antiracist organization. Through his vulnerability and openness about his personal experience of raising a child with autism, Shawn created a safe space for people to share their experiences of living with disabilities. As a leader, he sees the need for representation and believes advocacy is about continuous learning, promoting accessibility, and providing resources for all. Through the advancement of technology and the younger generation's passion for change, Shawn believes the negative perception of people with disabilities will continue to shift to a positive one. He hopes to continue to advocate by having difficult conversations and empowering people to get more involved to make change.

Sasha Perez, MPH

Program Manager, Brookdale Department of Geriatrics & Palliative Care, Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai

In her role, Sasha Perez focuses on qualitative research to close race and ethnicity disparity gaps; professional development; and being a diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) champion. One of her proudest accomplishments is advocating for a student intern who identifies as having a disability through the Office for Diversity and Inclusion's internship program. Sasha believes the internship will be an opening for a more inclusive and equitable workplace. Being a caregiver for the last 15 years, Sasha has unique insight into the barriers that people with disabilities encounter. In a recent experience, Sasha witnessed the intersection of race and disability in health care delivery, which highlighted the health disparities that exist. She hopes to make a positive impact by working to remove barriers and using her personal experience to advocate for people with disabilities.



Stephanie Alexander

Accounts Receivable Billing Coordinator, Faculty Practice Associates, Central Billing Office, Mount Sinai Health System

Stephanie Alexander finds value in being part of an organization that creates equity for those who identify as having a disability. As a person with a disability herself, she has learned to advocate for herself and encourages and teaches others to self-advocate as well. She wishes to create a workplace environment that is inclusive and promotes success for those living with disabilities. Stephanie has witnessed people's perception change over time and observed people are learning to work with people who are different. She also noticed that people are more receptive to understanding her own disability and accommodation needs. Stephanie believes it is important to continue exposing people to differences, educating and inspiring others to lean in, by not putting limitations on themselves due to a disability.



Alexandra Bohorquez, LMSW, MSN

Clinical Registered Nurse, Pediatrics, The Mount Sinai Hospital

Alexandra Bohorquez started her career as a Clinical Social Worker and discovered her passion for nursing after her son was diagnosed with Spinal Muscular Atrophy (SMA). As a caregiver, she saw an opportunity to not only raise awareness, but also teach clinical skills to those who treat people with disabilities. Alexandra knows the challenges of navigating the health care system and strives to create an environment where people living with disabilities feel supported, heard, and receive compassionate care. She notes the younger generation will continue to change the perspective of people with disabilities by using their social media platforms to promote inclusion. Reflecting on her son's experience, Alexandra hopes people will see people with disabilities as a person first, and not their disability.



Melissa Lakes, PT, DPT

Physical Therapist, Rehabilitation and Human Performance, The Mount Sinai Hospital

Melissa Lakes provides physical therapy to patients who experienced traumatic brain injury or stroke, helping them regain as much mobility and function as possible. Melissa advocates for her patients by promoting the benefits of a longer stay in the rehabilitative program when appropriate in order to maximize recovery for safe return to home. This ensures the patient is able to achieve the highest level of functional mobility for independence and limited use of assistive equipment. Melissa also realizes the opportunity to advocate for more accessible homes and finds creative ways to navigate structural barriers and modifications. She finds it rewarding to see her patients' progress and breakthroughs. Melissa inspires people with physical disabilities to believe that they can live a full and meaningful life through movement and physical activity.

