

2023 Presenter Biographies



Hold the Rope.
2023 Annual Conference
June 7-9, Saratoga Springs, NY



Laura Anderson, M.S. CCC-SLP, CBIS, - Neurological Rehabilitation Coordinator, North Westchester Restorative Therapy and Nursing Center. Laura graduated from the University of Notre Dame in 2016 with Bachelor of Science Degrees in Biological Sciences and Psychology and with concentrations in Neuroscience, Biomedical Sciences, and Global Health. She received her Master of Science Degree in Speech-Language Pathology from New York Medical College in 2018. Laura's research interests across her undergraduate and graduate studies included psycholinguistics, post-stroke aphasia, and dysphagia related to Parkinson's Disease.

Robert Anderson- TBI Telehealth Coordinator, VA Hudson Valley HCS. Robert is a USMC Veteran (2003-2007) with TBI diagnosis and has been a VA employee in the telehealth field since 2011.

Mi-Hyon Cho, MD – Brain Injury Medicine Specialist, VA Hudson Valley HCS. Dr. Cho is a Chief of the Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Department at the VA Hudson Valley Health Care System.

Alex C. Dell – Founder, The Law Firm of Alex Dell, PLL. Mr. Dell has over twenty-eight (28) years of experience representing injured and disabled individuals with their workers' compensation, disability retirement and social security disability claims.

Natalia Bernal Fernandez, PsyD- Rehabilitation Neuropsychology Postdoctoral Fellow, Mount Sinai Hospital. Dr. Bernal Fernández completed her doctoral degree in clinical psychology (PsyD) at Albizu University, in Puerto Rico, and her Bachelor of Arts degree at Boston College, double majoring in Applied Psychology and Human Development and Elementary Education. She completed her clinical internship at NYU Langone Health, Rusk Rehabilitation, where she gained extensive training in neuropsychology, cognitive remediation, and psychotherapy with patients following neurological injury and neuromedical conditions. Dr. Bernal Fernández is currently completing a two-year postdoctoral fellowship at Mount Sinai's Neuropsychology and Rehabilitation Department and Brain Injury Research Center (BIRC).

Olga Garduño-Ortega, B.A.- Research Coordinator, Rusk Rehabilitation Research Department. She has experience in public health and psychology. Olga engages in various research projects aimed at understanding the experiences of individuals and their loved ones after traumatic brain injury.

Lindsey Gurin, MD – Clinical Assistant Professor of Neurology, Psychiatry, and Rehabilitation Medicine, NYU Langone Hospital.

Caitlin Hebb, MT-BC, NMT-F – Clinical Operations Manager and Neurologic Music Therapy (NMT) Fellow, MedRhythms Therapy, Inc. Caitlin graduated from Berklee College of Music with a degree in Music Therapy and received her fellowship in NMT. She serves on the NMT Academy Advisory Council, providing objective input on actions that impact the future direction and growth of NMT. Caitlin manages MedRhythms partnerships and development for new NMT programs. Caitlin has spoken at regional and national conferences focusing on using NMT in neurorehabilitation and with various neurological populations.

Amelia Hicks, PhD - Post-Doctoral Fellow, Brain Injury Research Center, Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai. Dr Hicks' work focuses on the long-term cognitive and emotional outcomes following traumatic brain injury and aging with traumatic brain injury. She also examines the contribution of genetic factors to outcomes as well as key biomarker relationships (imaging, biofluids).

Brian Im, MD – Attending Physician, NYU Rusk Rehabilitation. Dr. Im is heavily involved in program development and academic medicine. He has an active role in brain injury rehabilitation research at NYU and Bellevue. After completing a rehabilitation residency at NYU School of Medicine/Rusk Rehabilitation, and a fellowship in brain injury medicine at UMDNJ/Johnson Rehabilitation Institute, his subsequent tenure at Bellevue Hospital focused upon an interest in improving brain injury rehabilitation for underserved populations. He remains involved in this research at Bellevue Hospital as a co-program director for the Bellevue and NYU Rusk TBI model system while at his current role as the director for brain injury rehabilitation medicine at NYU/Rusk Rehabilitation. Dr. Im is also the NYU brain injury medicine fellowship director and Rusk LOH inpatient medical director.

Ariel Johnson, TBI Survivor. As a brain injury survivor, Ariel is spreading awareness on how to shift one's mindset from being in a negative scarce intellect to an abundant "everything is going to work out" state. From her own experiences she will discuss tips and tricks that got her from knocking on death's door seconds away from dying to now living a successful independent life.

Michelle Kellen, M.Ed., Professional Development Manager, Brain Injury Association of New York State. Prior to joining BIANYS in 2019, she was in the education field for 28 years. Michelle served in various roles in education including teacher, coach, athletic director, and associate principal. In her duties at BIANYS she oversees all educational programs such as webinars, the annual conference, and the Brain Injury Symposium.

Kirk Lercher, M.D., MBS, Kessler Institute for Rehabilitation Director of Outpatient Traumatic Brain Injury Services is dual board certificated in physical medicine and rehabilitation (PM&R) and traumatic brain injury (TBI) medicine. He received his medical degree from Rutgers University - New Jersey Medical School, where he then completed his internship in internal medicine. He completed his residency training in PM&R at Kessler Institute for Rehabilitation and fellowship training in TBI at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center.

Garra C Lloyd-Lester, Coordinator, Suicide Prevention Center of New York State as Coordinator. Garra works with State and County partners, local governmental units, local coalitions, and other systems to build capacity to help reduce suicides across the lifespan. He facilitates a workgroup as part of the Governors Challenge to prevent suicide among Service Members, Veterans, and their Families (SMVF), a statewide steering committee to address suicide prevention among first responder disciplines and facilitated the statewide taskforce to develop recommendations on addressing suicide prevention among rural communities in NYS.

Allison Moir-Smith, M.A. – Concussion Activist, Concussion Recovery Art. Allison is a therapist for brides-to-be, an author, and artist. In 2017, she fell on a ski slope while standing still and wearing a helmet. The concussion she sustained that day changed her life.

Vanessa Moran MT-BC, NMT – Neurologic Music Therapist, MedRhythms, Inc. and Burke Rehabilitation Hospital. Vanessa graduated from Berklee College of Music with a B.M in Music Therapy. They completed an advanced certification in Neurologic Music Therapy because they believe the field stands at the corner of their two passions: neuroscience and music. Vanessa is the inpatient therapist at Burke Rehabilitation Hospital's Neurologic Music Therapy Program, and primarily works on Burke's Stroke and Brain Injury Unit.

Ricardo J Palomo, COTA/L, CBIS – Neurological Rehabilitation Coordinator, Emerge Nursing and Rehabilitation. Ricardo is a graduate of Suffolk Community College with an associate degree in occupational therapy and he is a New York State Licensed Certified Occupational Therapy Assistant with two years' experience collaborating with individuals and families of neurological injuries. He specializes in rehabilitation and community re-entry for individuals with TBI (Traumatic Brain Injury), CVA (Cerebral Vascular Accident) and SCI (Spinal Cord Injury)

Teri Rajnath, M.A. CCC-SLP, CBIS – Neurological Rehabilitation Coordinator, Quantum Rehab and Nursing. Teri earned her master's degree in Speech Language Pathology from St. John's University and obtained her Certificate of Clinical Competence in 1998. She received an additional certification as a Certified Brain Injury Specialist in 2018 which enables her to cater to the intense and unique needs of patients who have sustained injury to the brain, such as Traumatic Brain injury and strokes. Prior to joining the Paragon MGT SNF LLC team, Teri had worked for the Northwell Healthcare system at Southside Hospital for the last 20 years.

Brian Rieger, PhD – Assistant Professor of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, Upstate University Hospital. Brian is the former director of the Upstate Concussion center in Syracuse, NY. He also served as the co-chair of BIANYS' Concussion Initiative.

Elizabeth (Liz) Rider OTR/L – Clinical Team Leader Spinal Cord/Neurological Program, Burke Rehabilitation Hospital. Liz has worked at Burke since 2016, but previously collaborated with MedRhythms when working as an OT/CBIS at another rehabilitation hospital. Liz saw firsthand the value that NMT adds to the neuro-rehabilitative process and has been an advocate for NMT ever since. She is thrilled to share about the creation and development of this program at Burke.

Francine Sage-King PT, DPT, NCS, CBIS – Clinical Associate Professor, Marist College is a Clinical Associate Professor in the Doctor of Physical Therapy Program, Marist College in Poughkeepsie, NY. Francine teaches in the areas of neurologic physical therapy and limb loss. After receiving her BS in Kinesiology from Michigan State University, she completed her Doctor of Physical Therapy from Columbia University, NY. As a board-certified neurologic specialist, her practice areas include working in both the inpatient and outpatient rehabilitation setting treating individuals with both neurologic and limb loss impairments.

Michelle Smith, MPH – Assistant Research Scientist, Rusk Rehabilitation. Michelle’s background and interests are in health education programming and communications.

Jimbo Talbot- Founder of DrumQuest, Adventures in Happy, Healing, Rhythm and Sound, now in its 15th year. He facilitates individual and group growth, healing transformations through drum circles, sound and musical play and team building events. Jimbo is a graduate and facilitator of Health Rhythms; Village Music Circles; Music for People; and Ithaca School of Music. He is a presenter/trainer/facilitator with DrumSTRONG; Bassett Healthcare; Kennedy Willis Center; Pathfinder Village and VMC.

Will Tsai MD – Brain Injury Medicine Fellow, NYU Rusk Rehabilitation. He completed both medical school and PM&R Residency at NYU Grossman School of Medicine.

Jamie S Ullman MD, FACS – Professor, Department of Neurosurgery, Zucker School of Medicine at Hofstra/Northwell. Dr. Ullman joined Northwell Health in 2014 as Director of Neurotrauma at the Institute for Neurology and Neurosurgery at North Shore University Hospital. She brings 25 years of specialized expertise in the surgical management of head and spinal cord injuries, as well as acute neurological conditions such as stroke, cerebral hemorrhage, hydrocephalus, and brain tumors. A founding member of the Northwell Health Concussion Program, Dr. Ullman leads a team of experts in traumatic brain injury. She also works closely with the neurocritical care team in the Neurosurgery Intensive Care Unit at North Shore University Hospital to deliver comprehensive neurological services to the community. Fully committed to being accessible for her patients, Dr. Ullman is always there to answer questions and address any concerns with kindness and compassion. She takes the time to go over every aspect of care, whether it is reviewing diagnostic films or explaining the thorough details of a procedure. She is currently on the BIANYS Board of Directors and is the Chair of the Board of the ThinkFirst National Injury Prevention Foundation.

Megan Viera – Brain Injury Survivor. Megan sustained a severe traumatic brain injury in a terrible car accident in 2013. Doctors doubted if she would survive and if she did, thought she would be comatose for the rest of her life. Megan emerged from her coma after three months. After relearning how to do everything she was able to attend college and graduate with her associate degree in 2019. Megan is currently working on her bachelor's degree and still showing determination and a positive attitude, no matter how hard it gets.

Judith Wilson, OTR – Assistant Director of Occupational Therapy at Bellevue Hospital in NYC. She participates in several research projects with the NYU TBI Model Systems, and the System's Leadership Forum.