

2026 Northeastern Pepper Centers Meeting Agenda

Friday, February 27, 2026

**Cell and Genome Sciences Building, 400 Farmington Ave,
Farmington, CT, 06030**

Boston, Mount Sinai, UConn and Yale Pepper Centers

8:45-9:45 am: Registration and Continental breakfast

9:45-10:00 am: Welcome and Introductory comments

- Richard Fortinsky, Ph.D., UConn Pepper Center

10:00-11:00 am: Presentations by early-stage REC and PESC Scholars

- **Yale Pepper Center**

Cameron Gettel, MD MHS: “Improving Emergency Care Transitions for Older Adults: From Outcomes to Interventions”

Snigdha Jain, MD, MHS: “Improving ICU Survivorship for Older Adults: From Outcomes to Interventions”

- **UConn Pepper Center**

Madison Lee Doolittle, PhD: “Contextual Immunomodulatory Roles of Senescence in Skeletal Aging or Injury”

Germine Soliman, MD MS: “Appetite Loss, Inflammation and Incident Disability Among Community-Dwelling Older Adults”

11:00-11:15 am: Morning break

11:15 am-12:15 pm: Presentations by early-stage REC and PESC Scholars (continued)

- **Boston Pepper Center**

Shailesh Agarwal, MD: “Local GLP1 Therapy for Targeted Visceral Adipose Tissue Reduction in Old Age”

Mahdi Moqri, PhD, MBA: “Benchmarking and Validation of Blood-Based Biomarkers of Aging”

- **Mount Sinai Pepper Center**

Helen Knight, MD MPH: “Higher Levels of Care in the Medicare Hospice Benefit”

Leah E. Walsh, PhD: “Coping with Caregiving Transitions”

12:15-1:15 pm: Lunch

1:15-2:15 pm Poster Session

- Posters will be judged; opportunity for additional networking

2:15-3:45 pm: Specific Aims Presentations and Reviews

- Presenters will give an overview of the problem, objectives, and Aims, then reviewers will offer constructive critiques

- **Room # R1390:** 2 Aims presenters, 45 min each

Candidus Nwankasi, PhD, MSPH, UConn Pepper Center: “Social stress, social support, and health-related quality of life of older Black cancer survivors”

Rupal M. Parekh, PhD, MSW, MPH, UConn Pepper Center: “Enhancing Loneliness Assessment for Urban Black Older Adults: Community-Informed Measure Refinement and Intervention Development”

- **Room # R1202:** 2 Aims presenters, 45 min each

Madison Doolittle, Ph.D., UConn Pepper Center: “Influence of stromal senescence on immune and hematopoietic aging in the bone marrow”

Alissa Chen, MD, MPH, MHS, Yale Pepper Center: “Real-World Blood Pressure Effects of Incretin Mimetics in Older Adults”

- **Demo Room:** 3 Aims presenters, 30 min each

On-Yee Amy Lo, PhD, Boston Pepper Center: “Noninvasive brain stimulation to improve and sustain physical activity in older adults”

James Borders, PhD CCC-SLP, Boston Pepper Center: “Mechanisms of Aerodigestive Aging and Dysphagia: A Longitudinal Multisystem Model”

Judith B.Vick, MD MPH, Yale Pepper Center: “Applying relational coordination theory to the care of hospitalized persons living with dementia”

- **TIP Office R1800:** 2 Aims presenters, 45 min each

Courtney Millar, PhD, Boston Pepper Center: “Efficacy trial of tart cherry juice

intake on sleep quality and quantity as well as corresponding mechanisms in older adults with insomnia”

Meghan Short, PhD, Boston Pepper Center: “Microbial Tryptophan Metabolism in Aging: Insights from Metagenomics and Metabolomics in Long-Lived Cohort Studies”

3:45-4:00 pm: Afternoon break; coffee, soft drinks, cookies

4:00-4:30 pm: Open discussion; poster winners announced

- SPARK seminar series
- Expansion of SPARK series to other Pepper Centers in our region
- Other ideas for further consideration

4:30-4:45 pm: Closing remarks; adjourn

Poster Presenters:

1 Maks Fedorovskyy & Arthur Tao, Boston Pepper Center: “Aging Initiative: A Student-Led Model for Advancing Aging Research with a Translational Focus”

2 Courtney Millar, PhD, Boston Pepper Center: “Berries, Bugs, and the Blues, Oh My! A pilot study of blueberries to target the gut microbiome and mental well-being in older, sedentary adults with mild depressive symptoms”

3 Marielle Jensen-Battaglia, PT, DPT, PhD, Yale Pepper Center: “Mobility-Related Physical Function and Aging in Place for Older Adults With Chronic Conditions”

4 Olivia S. Malkowski, Ph.D., Yale Pepper Center: “Dynamic associations between intrinsic capacity and disability before death among older adults”

5 Nicole Bajdek, MS, Boston Pepper Center: “Testosterone replacement therapy is associated with meaningful improvements in high-intensity exercise endurance and physical function in prostate cancer survivors”

6 Zachary Harvanek, MD, PhD, Yale Pepper Center: “Lifetime Adversity Partially Mediates Relationships between Neighborhood Deprivation and Biological Aging”

7 Archana Sanjay, M Sc., PhD, UConn Pepper Center: “Cxcl9-Driven Disruption of the Periosteal Niche Limits Regeneration With Age”

#8 Benjamin T. Ristau, MD, MHA, UConn Pepper Center: “Patients with bladder and kidney cancer demonstrate accelerated biological aging compared to prostate cancer and non-cancer controls: A UK Biobank study”

9 Cristina Colón-Semenza, PT, MPT, PhD, UConn Pepper Center: “Peer support for physical activity using digital technology for older Latinx individuals living with Parkinson’s disease: A feasibility study”

10 Yashika Sharma, PhD, RN, UConn Pepper Center: “Sleep Phenotypes and Vascular Aging: Associations with Arterial Stiffness and Blood Pressure”

#11 Gawon Cho, Ph.D., Yale Pepper Center: “Brain pulsations that drive glymphatic transport in obstructive sleep apnea”

#12 Lihua Li, PhD, Mount Sinai Pepper Center: “Developing a Weighted Causal Forest Framework to Evaluate Population-Level Heterogeneous Treatment Effects in Geriatric Research”

#13 Christopher Woodrell, MD, MS, Mount Sinai Pepper Center: “A Novel Approach to Adverse Event Reporting in Behavioral and Health Services Trials Involving Seriously Ill and Older Adults”

#14 Alina Kung, MD MS, Mount Sinai Pepper Center: “Segregation Between Hospitals in New York State by Race and Insurance: Older Adults Compared With Adults Aged 18–64”

#15 R. Sean Morrison, MD, Mount Sinai Pepper Center: “Days at Home After Hip Fracture in Older Adults With and Without Dementia”

#16 Amir Baniassadi, PhD, Boston Pepper Center: “Feasibility of Remote-Controlled Field Experiments on Bedroom Temperature and Sleep Quality in Older Adults”

MEETING EVALUATION PROCEDURE

Early next week, you will receive an email message with a link to the REDCap meeting evaluation form. Please plan to complete the evaluation form at your earliest convenience.

**THANK YOU FOR ATTENDING TODAY!
SAFE TRAVELS!**