

Our Honorees:

Sophie Lanzkron, M.D.



It is with great delight that we honor Dr. Sophie Lanzkron, Director of the Sickle Cell Center for Adults at Johns Hopkins University, School of Medicine.

Sickle Cell Disease was a passion for Dr. Lanzkron long before she stepped into her current position. Upon completing her residency at the University of Maryland Medical System, she went on to complete a Hopkins fellowship in Hematology, following up with three years as a Staff Physician in Bone Marrow Transplant at the Texas Transplant Institute of the Southwest Texas Methodist Hospital. She returned to Hopkins in 2000 as an Assistant Professor of Medicine in the Departments of Oncology and Medicine (Hematology Division).

Upon stepping into the leadership of the Center at Hopkins, she has focused her professional energy on an ambitious agenda:

- Enhancing the lifestyle of patients and their families
- Promoting patient education regarding the symptoms and treatment of the condition
- Finding funding to support comprehensive treatment for Sickle Cell patients
- Building a cultural awareness of the needs of Sickle Cell patients
- Lobbying for a governmental understanding of Sickle Cell patients' special needs including insurance and employment policies

As an inherited condition, Sickle Cell Disease is no respecter of persons: the patient population crosses the spectrum of wealth, class, profession, and social status. Many patients wrestle with popular misconceptions held by insurers and employers, as they try to explain a chronic disease that surfaces in periodic, acute crises that can leave them hospitalized for two weeks or more.

Dr. Lanzkron and her staff have put much effort into advocating for these patients and supporting their struggles to retain the employment and insurance that will keep them fed, sheltered, and alive, says her physician's assistant, Mandy David.

A further challenge comes in the medications required to treat Sickle Cell Disease: In 1998, the FDA approved the use of hydroxyurea, which was predicted to decrease hospitalizations and the costs of care for those with sickle cell disease. However, hydroxyurea is underutilized by patients with sickle cell disease.

Dr. Lanzkron's research has shown that despite the approval of hydroxyurea, the ultimate costs of caring for patients with sickle cell disease have increased significantly over the last seven years. Many factors likely play a role in this increase in costs. Underutilization of hydroxyurea is a small part of this problem and Dr. Lanzkron is investigating whether this underutilization is caused by patients' reluctance to take this medication or doctors' not prescribing it when indicated.

Dr. Lanzkron believes that implementing a statewide comprehensive network of care for adults with sickle cell disease will improve the quality of care and this will in turn decrease the costs of these patients medical care

As part of her vision of comprehensive care, Dr. Lanzkron is seeking to create solutions through multiple avenues. "She is trying to get the government to understand, advocating that this is a situation that needs attention and funding for a cure," says Ms. David. "And she is teaching up and coming physicians about the disease to ensure proper care for this patient population into the future."