



ASSOCIATION OF PEDIATRIC
ONCOLOGY SOCIAL WORKERS

49TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Gaining Altitude:

Raising the Level of Psychosocial Care for
Pediatric Hematology & Oncology Patients
and their Families



APRIL 13-15, 2026

THE CURTIS HOTEL
DENVER, COLORADO

www.aposw.org

CE INFORMATION

Attendees are responsible for reviewing whether their state accepts these CE contact hours.

APOSW is recognized by the New York State Education Department's State Board for Social Work as an approved provider of continuing education for licensed social workers (#SW-0441). Social workers will receive up to **15** Social Work CE contact hours for this activity.

Upon completion of this program and submission of the CE activity evaluation, a certificate of completion will be issued to attendees **via email within 30 days.**

Contact education.profdev@aposw.org with questions.

ACCESSIBILITY & INCLUSION

APOSW strives to host inclusive, accessible events that enable all individuals, including those with disabilities, to engage fully. To request an accommodation or for inquiries about accessibility, please contact conference@aposw.org.

APOSW believes that no person should be excluded from association programs, services, or volunteer participation on the basis of race, color, religion (creed), gender, gender expression, age, national origin (ancestry), disability, marital status, sexual orientation, or military status, or for any other discriminatory reason.

CONFERENCE GOAL

To provide a collaborative learning opportunity for hematology and oncology social workers to address the needs of families impacted by childhood cancer and other blood disorders, while connecting with other professionals in their fields.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

At the conclusion of this conference, participants will be able to:

- Explain and apply social work theory, evidence-based practice, interventions, and techniques to address psychosocial care, barriers to care, and programmatic needs of pediatric hematology/oncology patients and family members from diagnosis through survivorship, and into the bereavement process.
- Describe evidence-based practice to support pediatric blood disorder and cancer patients and their families through discussions of research studies, outcomes, and recommendations in the field of pediatric hematology/oncology social work.
- Identify and discuss the psychosocial needs of children diagnosed with blood diseases and cancer and their families toward compassionate end of life care, healing and future positive growth.
- Evaluate methods for professional development through leadership in the field of pediatric hematology/oncology and blood and marrow transplantation.

IMPORTANT DATES



EARLY REGISTRATION CLOSES **3/1/2026**



CANCELLATION DATE *

**must be submitted in writing to receive a refund less a \$100 processing fee*

3/31/2026

REGISTRATION

REGISTER BY MARCH 1ST TO RECEIVE A \$100 EARLY BIRD DISCOUNT!!!

FULL REGISTRATION

FULL MEMBER	\$500
ASSOCIATE MEMBER	\$575
STUDENT MEMBER	\$280
STUDENT NON-MEMBER	\$330
RETIRED MEMBER	\$310
NON-MEMBER	\$700

ONE-DAY REGISTRATION

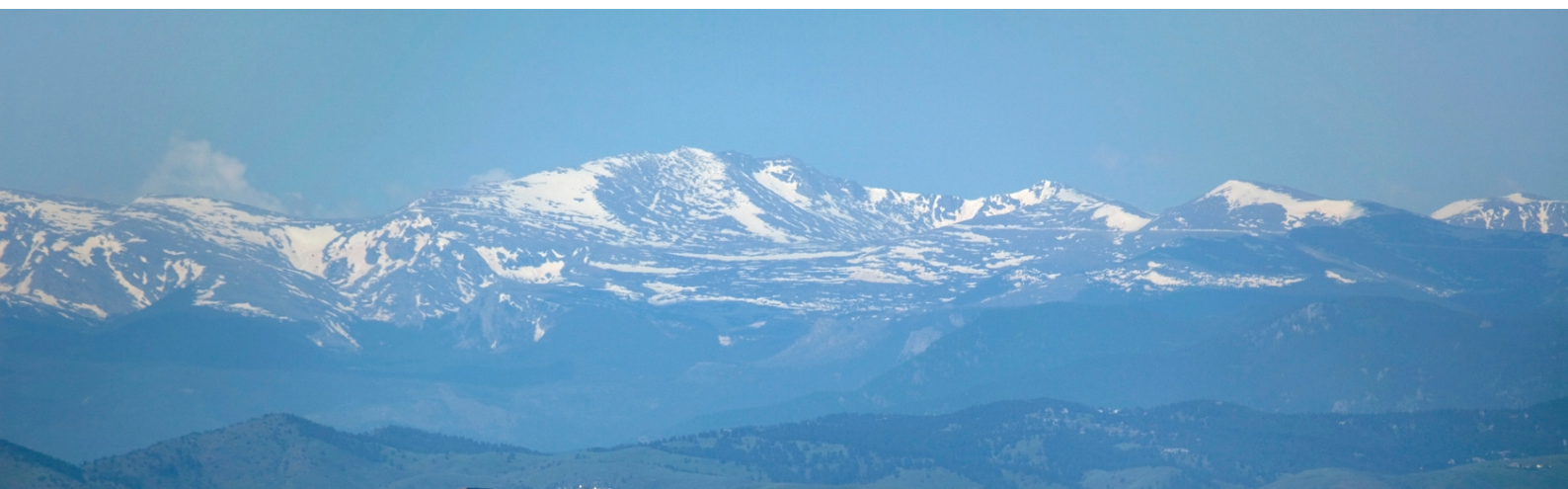
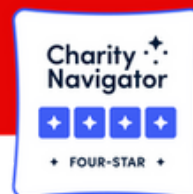
MEMBER	\$260
NON-MEMBER	\$325

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**Blood Cancer
United**



DAY 1

Monday April 13th

7:30AM - 8:30AM

REGISTRATION & BREAKFAST SOLO SOCIAL WORKERS

Grab breakfast and connect with others who are the only pediatric hematology/oncology social worker in their institution.

8:30AM - 8:45 AM

WELCOME

Rachel Rogovin, LICSW, APOSW President

National Director of Psychosocial Services, Team IMPACT

8:45 AM - 9:45 AM

KEYNOTE 1

Leadership and Advocacy in Serious Illness Care: Our Time is NOW

Shirley Otis-Green, MSW, MA, ACSW, LCSW, OSWC, FNAP, FAOSW, Founder and Consultant Collaborative Caring

Regardless of our "official" title – as professionals, we each have a leadership role to play as advocates for the improved delivery of care. As the foundations of healthcare in the US is being dismantled, our fractured systems of care results in ever more inequitable access and worsening health outcomes. This presentation will invite participants to identify their motivation for this work and reflect upon our role as agents of change. We will identify advocacy and leadership opportunities to bring the voice of those we serve into the conversation as the delivery of healthcare is being reimaged. We will consider a range of concrete steps that we might take during times of systemic crisis and uncertainty.

10:00AM - 12:15 PM

SKILL BUILDING SESSION 1



Caregiver Rights & Resources

Laura Beilke, Esq, BA, JD, Triage Cancer

This workshop helps oncology social workers address caregivers' legal and financial issues, including employment rights, state family and medical leave laws, maintaining income while taking time off, and considerations when a child turns 18 and remains in treatment.



Echos: Creating a Paradigm for Working with Difficult and Meaningful Cases in Pediatric Oncology Social Work by Integrating our Voices, Past and Present

Laura Moynihan, LICSW, OSW-C, APHSW-C, Hasbro Children's Hospital

Nancy Cincotta, LCSW, MPhil, OSW-C, Richi Childhood Cancer Foundation

This workshop will present themes from qualitative survey data collected over the past 30 years about notable cases that stick with pediatric oncology social workers. The presenters will facilitate discussion with attendees about current cases to identify patterns in how clinicians derive meaning and create sustainable social work practice.



Mapping the Journey: A Program Development Workshop for Pediatric Oncology Social Workers

Anna Lunsford, LICSW, Dana-Farber Cancer Institute

Larissa Hewitt, LICSW, Dana-Farber Cancer Institute

This session presents an overview of a literature-backed, equity-informed approach to program development in pediatric oncology. In this workshop, participants will enhance these skills and build confidence by drafting a stepwise framework to design, launch, and evaluate a psychosocial support program in their specific clinical environments.

12:15 – 1:15PM

LUNCH ON YOUR OWN

1:15 – 2:15PM

BREAKOUT SESSION 1



Go Wish!

Valerie Kennedy Lang, LCSW, *Thyme Care*
Wade Iwata, LICSW, *Seattle Children's Hospital*

Aligned with the 2026 theme "Gaining Altitude," this session invites social workers to explore the heart of end-of-life care through the Go WISH framework—building confidence, compassion, and self-awareness to navigate tender conversations that honor what matters most to patients and families.



Not Too Young to Understand: A Scoping Review of Meaning-Making About Illness in Children and Adolescents With Cancer

Yixuan Wang, MSW, *Colorado State University*

This scoping review examines how children (6-12) and adolescents (13-18) make meaning of their cancer experiences. Findings reveal diverse, developmentally nuanced meaning-making processes, underscoring the importance of centering youth perspectives in psychosocial oncology care, research, and policy.



Sickle Cell Disease Equity and Ethical Awareness

Margery Johnson, LCSW, *St. Jude Children's Research Hospital*
Trudy Tchume-Johnson, LCSW, *Children's Hospital of Philadelphia*
Doreen Monroe, LSW, *Robert Wood Johnson*

This will be an interactive workshop focusing on unpacking the Four Pillars of Bioethics and how to apply these principles to the case of "CC," a six-year-old patient with sickle cell disease (SCD) whose family is in conflict with the medical provider about treatment recommendations. The conflict has resulted in an ethical dilemma for the providers. This will lead to a discussion that explores how SCD impacts racially and culturally diverse communities and highlights the importance of culturally responsive care. Attendees will learn principles of cultural competence and humility, and gain practical tools to support SCD patients and families with equity, compassion, and respect.





2:15PM - 3:00PM

VISIT EXHIBITORS

3:00PM - 4:00PM

BREAKOUT SESSION 2



Navigating Turbulence: Supporting “Difficult” Families Through the Storm with a Trauma Informed Lens

Caley Nelson, LCSW, *Phoenix Children’s Hospital*

Participants will explore the complexities of the family dynamics, recognizing how stress, fear, and uncertainty can manifest in difficult behaviors. Through case studies and interactive discussions, we will delve into practical techniques for fostering open communication, building trust, and promoting resilience among families.



Sickle Cell Disease AYA Psychosocial Programming

Ebele Ekweanya, MSW Student, *Florida International University*
Chasity Woodard, LMSW, *Texas Children’s Hospital*

This case study examines the psychosocial challenges of young Nigerians living with sickle cell anemia, exploring pain, stigma, and resilience through lived experiences. It calls for improved psychosocial support, pain care, public awareness, and policy reform. Then we will explore the Creating Real Unity (CRU) program which is a teen-centered sickle cell support group at Texas Children's Hospital fostering connection, coping, and confidence among adolescents. Through quarterly interactive sessions, CRU empowers youth to build peer relationships, self-advocacy, and resilience, enhancing engagement and psychosocial well-being.



The Voices of Emerging Adults: A Qualitative Study on What is Most Important within Advanced Care Planning

Devon Ciampa, LICSW, *National Cancer Institute*

Emerging Adults (EAs) living with cancer are a unique subset within the adolescent and young adult population. Few EAs participate in advance care planning (ACP) conversations and need access to age-appropriate ACP tools, such as Voicing My CHOICES. This talk focuses on what emerging adults need to engage with ACP and how social workers can help.

4:00PM - 4:15PM

BREAK

4:15PM - 5:15PM

BREAKOUT SESSION 3



Rural Healthcare: Bridging the Gaps from the Big City

Bryn Dunham, LCSW, *University of Colorado Hemophilia and Thrombosis Center*

Health equity and social determinants of health are common buzz words in our medical culture and uniquely impact families living in rural communities. Social workers are exceptionally poised to contribute to related initiatives and programming. Attendees will leave this presentation with concrete ideas for their work with rural communities.



Sickle Cell Disease Clinical Programs

Elizabeth Congdon-Martin, LCSW, *Children's Hospital of Philadelphia*

Deja Houser, LSW, *Children's Hospital of Philadelphia*

Trudy Tchume-Johnson, LCSW, *Children's Hospital of Philadelphia*

Shirley Johnson, LCSW, *Virginia Commonwealth University*

Allison McGirr-Crowley, LICSW, *Brown Health Comprehensive Sickle Cell Center*;

Carrienne Stoker-Postier, LISW-CP, *Prisma Health Sickle Cell Lifespan Center*

Doreen Monroe, LSW, *Prisma Health Children's Hospital-Upstate*

Community Health Workers (CHW) are impactful and necessary in working with adult patients with sickle cell disease using intense case management and relationship building. This presentation will examine the integration of Clinical Social Workers and CHWs in sickle cell care to improve clinical outcomes, workforce sustainability, and cost-efficiency. National survey data and a case study illustrate how role delineation and collaborative planning enhance service delivery.



Men Need Support Too: Closing the Gap for Fathers and Male Caregivers

Ariel Brennan, LSW, *Children's Hospital of Philadelphia*

Sarah Brady, LSW, *Children's Hospital of Philadelphia*

Jonathan Wall, MBA, MIM, *Zach's Bridge*

Brian Burkhardt, BA, *Oliver Patch Project*

Dan Didio, BA, *Madelyn James Foundation*

Lori Weiner, DCSW, *National Institutes of Health/National Cancer Institute*

This session will present M.E.N.S., a program designed to connect and empower men who are caregivers of pediatric oncology patients. Presenters will discuss program development, implementation, lessons learned, and plans for the future, offering attendees practical strategies to replicate this innovative model at their own institutions. The session will also explore how fathers of children with cancer often face barriers to finding and engaging in peer support. This session provides an in-person panel of fathers, and their perspectives to explore awareness, access, and impact—equipping social workers with strategies to better connect dads with meaningful, well-matched resources.

7:30AM - 8:30AM

**CONTINENTAL BREAKFAST
& REGISTRATION**

8:00AM - 9:00AM

SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS (SIG)

SIGs provide an opportunity for social workers to meet in smaller groups to discuss specific topics of interest:

- **BMT**
- **Community Based Programs**
- **Leadership**
- **Neuro-Oncology**
- **Survivorship**

9:00 AM - 9:15 AM

BREAK/VISIT EXHIBITS

9:15 AM - 10:15 AM

BREAKOUT SESSION 4 **Using Professional Mentoring to Grow in Your Clinical Practice**

Elyse Levin-Russman, LICSW, OSW-C, *Massachusetts General Hospital*

Jess Nambudiri, LSW, OSW-C, *Children's Hospital of Philadelphia*

Nina Connors, LCSW, *Mount Sinai Kravis Children's Hospital*

Mentorship has added value to social work practice and described as transformative in shaping career development and satisfaction. We will explore how you can enhance your clinical skills through professional mentoring. We will help you identify how to find a mentoring program and leverage the relationship to get the most out of the process.

 Sickle Cell Disease Education

Trudy Tchume-Johnson, LCSW, *Children's Hospital of Philadelphia*

Kaitlin Murtagh, MA, Ed, *Children's Hospital of Philadelphia*

This session will evaluate a secure communication system and tailored academic support to address educational inequities for students with sickle cell disease (SCD). Findings from 2020-2025 highlight persistent barriers, absenteeism, and the need for interest-driven interventions to promote academic equity. This session will also explore the impact of sickle cell disease (SCD) on academic performance across the lifespan, highlighting proactive strategies and key resources to support students from early education through adulthood. Emphasis is placed on 504/IEP navigation and the value of collaboration between schools, healthcare teams, and families.



10:15AM - 10:30AM

BREAK

10:30AM - 11:30AM

PANEL



What are the Mutual Benefits of Social Work and Industry Partnerships?

Kelli Wright, *Day One Biopharmaceuticals*

Sarah Davis, LCSW, *Duke University Health System*

Kelsey Pease, LCSW, *Lurie Children's Hospital*

Jennifer St.Clair, LCSW, OSW-C, *University of Florida, College of Medicine*

Learn how to build impactful collaborations with pharmaceutical patient advocacy teams through a case study of Day One Biopharmaceuticals' partnership with pediatric neuro-oncology social workers to elevate the lived experiences of pediatric low-grade glioma (pLGG) patients and families.



Supporting Pediatric Cancer Survivors: Addressing Neurocognitive Late Effects as Chronic Health Needs

Stephanie Attaway, LMSW, OSW-C, *Blood Cancer United*

Marie Brewer, LMSW, OSW-C, *Blood Cancer United*

We will dive into the history of advocacy in Social Work and Social Workers' role in advocacy today. We will address current issues and how Pediatric Oncology/Hematology Social Workers can make a difference. Late effects as chronic health needs. Gain practical tools to assess, intervene, and empower survivors and families for long-term well-being and adaptive functioning.



From Lived Experience to Lasting Impact: A Framework for Redefining Family Support in Pediatric Cancer

Jacquelyn Didio, *Madelyn James Pediatric Cancer Foundation*

Amanda Van Wagner, *Alex's Lemonade Stand Foundation for Childhood Cancer*

Improving outcomes for children with cancer requires more than medical advances—it means removing financial and social barriers. This session highlights the Madelyn James Pediatric Cancer Foundation and Alex's Lemonade Stand Foundation, showing how equity-driven, relationship-based support strengthens families, partnerships, and outcomes.





11:30AM - 1:00PM

NETWORKING LUNCH & BUSINESS MEETING

Network, learn about the business of APOSW and celebrate the Social Workers of the Year!

1:00PM - 3:15PM

SKILL BUILDING SESSION 2



Supporting Pediatric Cancer Survivors: Addressing Neurocognitive Late Effects as Chronic Health Needs

Rebecca Morse, LICSW, *Dana-Farber Cancer Institute*

Marcella Mazzenga, LCSW, *Dana-Farber Cancer Institute*

Learn evidence-based strategies for social workers to support pediatric cancer survivors by addressing neurocognitive late effects as chronic health needs. Gain practical tools to assess, intervene, and empower survivors and families for long-term well-being and adaptive functioning.



Navigating Health Insurance to Avoid Financial Toxicity

Laura Beilke, Esq., B.A., J.D., *Triage Cancer*

This workshop will help oncology social workers address caregivers' legal and financial issues, covering key health insurance topics such as using coverage effectively, appealing denials, ACA protections, and considerations when a child turns 18 and remains in treatment.



Living with Intention: A Values-Based Application of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy in End-of-Life Care for AYA Oncology Patients

Megan Fitzgerald, LICSW, *Dana-Farber Cancer Institute*

Explore how Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) supports adolescent and young adult oncology patients at end of life through a values-based approach that promotes dignity, meaning, and intentional living in their final days. Practical strategies and case examples provided.

3:15PM - 4:00PM

VISIT EXHIBITORS

4:00PM - 5:00PM

BREAKOUT SESSION 5



The Restorative Pause: Cultivating Self-Care Through Intentional Workday Breaks

Elizabeth Lachat, LCSW, *Connecticut Children's Medical Center*

Mary Laliberte, LCSW, *Connecticut Children's Medical Center*

In the midst of demanding days, even a brief pause can restore clarity, compassion and connection. This session reimagines self-care not as another task but as a meaningful, doable practice to boost resilience and capacity to deliver high quality psychosocial care. Attendees will leave with a toolkit of strategies to integrate into their workplace.



Education within Hematology/Oncology

Britt Particelli, LICSW, OSW-C, **Allyson Messer, LICSW**, **Meghan Wodill, LGSW**, *Mayo Clinic*

Jemma Stratton, LCSW, *Inova Peterson Life with Cancer*

Vanessa Wagener, MEd, *ASK Childhood Cancer Foundation*

Explore how our multidisciplinary team created a user-friendly school support plan to help children with cancer and blood disorders stay connected to learning and peers. This tool empowers families to advocate for their child's needs, eases communication with schools, and supports academic and social continuity across diverse learning environments. This session will also explore how ASK Childhood Cancer Foundation collaborated with Inova Peterson Life with Cancer to address gaps in AYA education support by integrating specialized interventions into existing AYA programming. This has included providing individualized academic and vocational guidance, improving post-treatment transitions, and supporting long-term well-being.



Elevating Sibling Voices: Research, Real-World Practice, and Scalable Strategies for Pediatric Oncology Social Work

Larissa Hewitt, LICSW, *Dana-Farber Cancer Institute*

Nicole Cabral, MS, *Dana-Farber Cancer Institute*

This session examines research on sibling coping in pediatric oncology, outlines our center's supports including a flexible, activity-based virtual group, and lets participants hear directly from siblings and caregivers through audiovisual content. Attendees will gain practical, scalable strategies to enhance sibling inclusion and support.



7:30AM - 8:30AM CONTINENTAL BREAKFAST & REGISTRATION**8:00AM - 9:00AM SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS (SIG)**

SIGs provide an opportunity for social workers to meet in smaller groups to discuss specific topics of interest:

- **Advocacy**
- **AYA**
- **EOL/Palliative Care**
- **Hematology**
- **Research**

9:00AM - 10:00AM BREAKOUT SESSION 6**Leveraging Artificial Intelligence in Pediatric Oncology and Hematology Social Work: Tools, Ethics, and Practice Readiness**

Michelle Fritsch, LCSW, *Texas Children's Hospital*

Explore how AI can enhance pediatric oncology/hematology social work by supporting clinical care, training new social workers with case-based curricula, designing programs, and generating challenging case scenarios—all while addressing ethics, equity, and human-centered practice.

**Helping Children Make Sense of Cancer: The Power of Personalized Social Stories in Pediatric Oncology**

Alexandra Finkel, LCSW, *Kind Minds Therapy*

Learn how customized social stories help pediatric cancer patients prepare for, process, and cope with treatment. This session explores how narrative tools reduce anxiety, build coping skills, and strengthen connection between children, caregivers, and care teams.

**Elevating Psychosocial Care for Pediatric Solid Tumor Patients and Families: A Glimpse into Anchoring Social Work in Multidisciplinary Collaboration**

Paige Malinowski, LICSW, *Dana-Farber Cancer Institute*

Megan Fitzgerald, LICSW, *Dana-Farber Cancer Institute*

This session will focus on enhancing social work involvement and leveraging the social work skillset within multidisciplinary pediatric oncology teams. Attendees will learn strategies for operationalizing the Psychosocial Standards of Care through advocacy, collaboration, communication, and continuity to provide quality family-centered care.



10:00 AM- 10:10AM

BREAK

10:10AM - 11:10AM

BREAKOUT SESSION 7



Shifting Tasks and Strengthening Care: The Development of a Collaborative Psychosocial Support Model in a Pediatric Oncology Social Work Department

Erica Sirrine, LCSW, FT, PhD, *St. Jude Children's Research Hospital*

Emily Stuart, LBSW, *St. Jude Children's Research Hospital*

This breakout explores the development of two programs within a social work department—case management and cultural navigation—to help staff effectively balance the provision of clinical psychosocial interventions with intensive case management services. The role and scope of each program will be explored, and case examples will highlight successes, challenges, and implications for future practice.



Building Community: Creating Opportunities for Clinicians of Color

Mei Swartz, LICSW, *Dana-Farber Cancer Institute*

This session invites people who identify as a clinician of color to authentically share about their lived experiences at their respective workplaces, generate ideas for sustainable practice, and build community with one another.



Feeling is Healing! Releasing Complex PTSD Through Creative Expression, Somatic Movement and Sound Healing

Heidi Hartung Rispoli, LSW, *Tomorrows Children's Fund, Weiss Wellness*

Insight from a bereaved childhood cancer mom and social worker. Learn more about alternative therapies and experience firsthand the benefits of multi sensory interventions. This is an interactive session please come prepared to move

11:10AM - 11:20AM

BREAK

11:20AM - 12:20PM

BREAKOUT SESSION 8



Raising the Bar of Care: Survivor-Informed, Community-Driven Psychosocial Support in Pediatric Oncology

Marissa Hall, LCSWA, LMSW, *A Moment of Magic*

This interactive workshop explores survivor-informed, community-based strategies to close psychosocial gaps in pediatric oncology. Learn to integrate trauma-informed care, leverage partnerships, and apply ethical, equity-centered approaches to improve outcomes for children and families.



Balancing Healing and Hustle: Elevating Support for Young Adults Navigating Cancer and Work

Heather DeRousse, LCSW, OSW-C, *MD Anderson Cancer Center*

Young adults with cancer face unique challenges balancing treatment, recovery, and work. This presentation explores key concerns, strategies, and care innovations that elevate support and help AYAs thrive personally and professionally after cancer.



Bolstering Family Support: How a Narrative Medicine Project is Building Community

Kathy Riley, Certified Health Education Specialist, MS, MPH, *Cancer Support Community of Los Angeles*

This session introduces social workers to Narrative Medicine in practice, examining caregivers of pediatric cancer patients who participated in workshops that fostered deep conversations among participants, helped them cope with harrowing experiences associated with a child's cancer diagnosis and built community through close reading and writing.

12:30 PM - 1:30 PM

KEYNOTE 2

The Power of Storytelling In Healthcare

Rachel Rusch, LCSW, MSW, MA, APHSW-C, *University of Colorado; Assistant Professor, Department of Pediatrics Children's Hospital Colorado Psychosocial Director, Section of Palliative Medicine*

Stories are an important and impactful tool in pediatric healthcare social work, shaping how children and families understand illness, cope with uncertainty, and engage in care. Beyond clinical data and treatment plans, stories give voice to unique lived experiences – shining light on an individual's hopes, fears, strengths, and cultural identity.

Social workers are poised to lead meaningful and impactful change within healthcare settings alongside the power of story. This presentation will explore the critical role of story in psychosocial assessment, intervention, and advocacy within pediatric healthcare settings. By honing interventions that elicit and honor patient and family narratives, social workers gain deeper insight into psychosocial needs that may otherwise remain unseen, enabling more holistic and ethically responsive care. Story is not simply supplemental to medical care – it is essential to healing, connection, and sustainability.

1:30PM - 1:40PM

CLOSING REMARKS

Rachel Rogovin, LICSW, APOSW President

National Director of Psychosocial Services, Team IMPACT