The Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention (CHPDP) aims to incorporate community partners and members in their research to improve health and prevent disease in vulnerable populations. Dr. Nandita Khera, of the Mayo Clinic Cancer Center of AZ in Phoenix, discussed her role as a research community partner with CHPDP faculty, Dr. Shelby Langer.

Please describe your background (education and career), current position at the Mayo Clinic Cancer Center AZ, and work/research with Dr. Langer.

I am currently a hematologist and oncologist at the Mayo Clinic in Arizona. I completed medical school in India, my residency in Pittsburgh, and a fellowship in Seattle at the University of Washington, where I also completed my Masters in Public Health. The Mayo Clinic in Arizona provided me an opportunity to be a part of the hematology division. My area of clinical and research focus is on long-term follow-up of transplantation so this was an opportunity for me develop the program here... which originally attracted me to this position. Currently I am a clinician but do research focused on psychosocial outcomes in patients with hematologic malignancies, especially those undergoing stem cell transplants.

In addition to having common research interests, Dr. Langer and I actually know each other from the Seattle area through other researchers. When she took her position at Arizona State University, we came together to collaborate on similar research programs. The main project we have collaborated on so far focuses on developing digital storytelling videos for transplant patients and their care givers to help improve psychosocial outcomes. Dr. Sunny Kim, faculty in ASU’s College of Nursing and Health Innovation, is the Principal Investigator on this project; we are approaching the enrollment phase of that study. Dr. Langer also worked on one of my grants focused on patients facing financial burdens from their cancer treatment. She has helped in designing the protocol and providing additional input for developing a psycho-educational intervention directed towards financial hardship. We look forward to future work in the area of communication interventions for transplant patients and their partners, which is Dr. Langer’s area of expertise. It’s wonderful to have partnerships with institutes and people who continue to work together on multiple projects.

How would you describe the Mayo Clinic Cancer Center’s work within the community/Phoenix area and their primary health concerns?

The Mayo Clinic Cancer Center here in Arizona is part of a 3site National Cancer Institute (NCI) designated comprehensive cancer center. The other locations are in Minnesota and Florida. We aim to provide well-coordinated, multidisciplinary care that is based on cutting edge research while trying to provide individualized medicine and care to cancer patients. We also work very hard at making the overall experience a better one with a big focus on the psychosocial aspects of cancer care and health care delivery in addition to the clinical trials and the medical treatments.

Our center mission, as a transdisciplinary and collaborative research center, is to focus on enhancing the health and well-being of diverse populations across the lifespan with the help of community partners. How do you see the Mayo Clinic Cancer Center and CHPDP benefitting from this partnership in regards to our mission and your patients?

We at the Mayo Clinic Cancer Center in Arizona aim to provide well rounded care for our patients and focus heavily on cancer prevention and control. In fact, that is one of the important research programs of the cancer center. The collaboration between Mayo and the CHPDP is a win-win because we have the patient population and clinical expertise
while ASU can bring the research expertise and projects that are based on specific communities in need. The collaboration has the best chance of success with experts from both sides. There are multiple projects taking place between the CHPDP and our cancer center, as well as many other departments within ASU and the Mayo Clinic Cancer Center. This makes it an extensively multidisciplinary collaboration across the board. We aim to continue to provide excellent medical care to patients throughout the cancer continuum; ASU helps with this through the various research initiatives in the areas of prevention, post-treatment/survivorship, and rehabilitation. The collaboration is where creative and innovative ideas are shaped.

**What makes you passionate about the work you do at the Mayo Clinic Cancer Center?**

For me, the passion I have for my work comes from the specific area I have chosen: the financial burden of cancer treatment. I continuously hear stories from patients about financial hardships; to be able to do something that can directly impact them is what’s most gratifying to me and keeps me going. It’s easy to put extra effort and time into work and research that is so important to me. Having great collaborators, whether from our Rochester Mayo site, CHPDP, or other institutions, having a supportive environment and leadership who care about the research and education in addition to clinical practice, I believe that is what makes me so passionate about what I do here.

**What do you hope to do more of this coming year for both the Mayo Clinic Cancer Center and your work/research with Dr. Langer?**

I hope we can obtain additional funding to continue our collaboration! Dr. Langer and I are both part of a group in stem cell transplantation research that is coming together in the American Society of Blood and Marrow Transplantation to promote biobehavioral research in the area through exchange of ideas/ methodologies and expertise. We both were a part of recently completed PCORI engagement grant that helped develop a patient-centered outcomes research agenda in hematopoietic cell transplantation by involvement of multiple stakeholders. I am hoping that not only the project we have discussed moves forward, but I also hope we continue to come up with innovative ideas. As always, funding is the main factor in our work so I do hope to continue writing and receive grants and other funded opportunities.