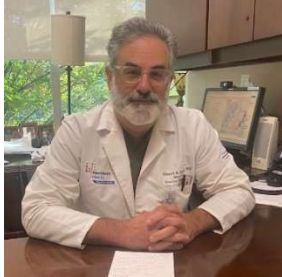


NYSIA JANUARY 2025 ANNUAL MEETING SPEAKERS



Robert Duarte, MD is the Director of the Pain Management team at Northwell Neurology Neuroscience Department. He is also the Associate Professor of Neurology at Zucker Hofstra School of Medicine. Dr. Duarte is a founding member of the Northwell Concussion Center and continues to be the primary Neurologist assessing and treating post concussion conditions. He has written chapters and lectured extensively on the role of the neurologist in traumatic brain injury, headache and chronic pain. Dr. Duarte is a sideline physician for higher school football teams in Queens and Long Island. He served as Captain and Surgeon General of the New York State Guard 2017-2023 and was the President of the New York State Pain Society from 2016-2018.

He performs IME examinations for neurological conditions including pain, headache and traumatic brain conditions.



Tracey McLean has nearly three decades of experience defending employers, insurance carriers, and third-party administrators in workers' compensation claims across New York State. During that time, she has authored numerous articles for industry publications, spoken at conferences on a variety of employer-related topics, and provided training seminars to assist employers and claims professionals in navigating the complexities of the workers compensation system in New York. She has been named a Super Lawyer for multiple years in the area of workers compensation for Upstate New York. In addition to her practice, Tracey finds great satisfaction in serving her community through her involvement with several legal agencies and organizations, including her work as a Law Guardian in the Fourth Department representing and protecting the interests of children in legal proceedings; as a Pro Bono panelist of the Onondaga County Bar Association providing legal advice and assistance to victims of domestic violence; and as a board member of multiple non-profits in Central New York. Her work as an animal welfare advocate includes fostering, rescuing, and transporting neglected or abandoned animals across the northeast and Canada, and fundraising for their care. Most recently, she started a scholarship fund benefitting the girls of a remote village in Papua New Guinea, created in appreciation for the village's assistance with recovery of her grandfather, a pilot whose plane crashed near the village during a mission in WWII.



Zachary Pratt represents employers, insurance carriers, and third-party administrators before the New York State Workers' Compensation Board and in federal workers' compensation litigation. He is involved in every aspect of the workers' compensation claim process, from inception through resolution. Zach represents clients before the Supreme Court of the State of New York; the Appellate Division, Third Department; the United States District Court for the Northern District of New York; state and federal administrative agencies; and in various arbitration proceedings. Throughout his career, Zach has developed extensive experience representing employers in the following industries: Retail and Hospitality; Warehousing and Distribution; Manufacturing; Healthcare; Municipalities, Governmental and Public Entities; Construction; and, Trucking and Transportation. Zach has earned a reputation as a highly effective litigator and advocate. He frequently handles complex matters involving multiple parties or injuries; catastrophic loss, including loss of life; environmental and exposure, fraud; and, discrimination and retaliation under Section 120 of the New York Workers' Compensation Law. In addition to workers' compensation litigation, Zach also represents employers in a range of employment and labor disputes, and has defended employers in claims under the Jones Act and The Longshore and Harbor Workers' Compensation Act. In addition to his litigation practice, Zach serves as a trusted counsellor to clients on all manner of risk management issues, including Workers' Compensation and Integrated Disability and Leave Management. Zach has developed programs offering cross-disciplinary solutions, including joint defense programs, providing clients with continuity of counsel and better addressing the unique challenges of managing the myriad issues which arise out of the patchwork of interconnected laws, regulations and programs governing the workforce. Zach is also a frequent lecturer, presenter and commentator on issues relating to New York Workers' Compensation, as well as Integrated Disability and Leave Management and Risk Management.



For the past 25 years, **Hana Bloch** has managed the Leave Management Office at Columbia University. Currently she serves as the Director of the Office, along with a team of four others. Beginning from the ground up as a one person show, she has built this program to serve the needs of the University community, creating an office that manages all leaves inclusive of Workers' Compensation, FMLA, Short Term Disability, Long Term Disability and Workplace Accommodations. This unique arrangement blends services typically serviced by offices such as risk management, benefits, employee relations and labor relations into one. Prior to assuming this role, she earned her master's degree in social work from Columbia University, specializing in workplace matters. While in school she researched mental health in the workplace and worked for a pilot program with DC-37 (municipal services union in NYC) addressing mental health in the workplace. She also served as a Director of Welfare to Work Program in NYC.



Kenesha Giocastro, MPA serves as the Assistant Director of the Leave Management Office at Columbia University. In this pivotal role, she strategically positions herself at the heart of the University's central administrative leave and disability operations, focusing on the case management for various leaves of absence including FMLA, Workers Compensation, Short Term Disability leaves, and Workplace Accommodations. Kenesha has provided management and oversight, notable was her leadership managing as part of a team, the response to COVID-related leave and vaccine exemptions, ensuring compliance with Local, State and Federal guidelines. Acknowledging the value that technology plays within case management, one of her primary roles was the implementation of a state-of-the-art leave of absence tracking system to manage all disability claims across the University, including the Medical Center. This initiative aims to streamline processes, enhancing efficiency while focusing on timely employee return to work and cost reduction. She is widely recognized for her reliability, professionalism, and unwavering commitment to excellence. Prior to joining Columbia University, Kenesha held the position of Specialty Claims Manager at an Independent Medical Evaluation company, managing the daily operations of the Workers Compensation team. With a career spanning 15 years, Kenesha entered the industry with a focus on Vocational Rehabilitation of injured workers. Her primary goal has always been to assist individuals in reentering the workforce, aligning perfectly with the broader mission of improving workplace well-being and productivity.



Nikki Adler, MSW, is the Manager of the Leave Management Office at Columbia University, where she oversees disability leave and return-to-work requests for both Columbia University and Columbia University Medical Center. In this role, she ensures compliance with university policies as well as federal and state regulations, while delivering exceptional customer service to employees, managers, physicians, and HR professionals. Nikki's primary focus is on supporting faculty and staff with their workplace accommodation requests.

Before joining Columbia, Nikki worked with individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, helping them secure employment, develop their social skills, and providing support to both the employees and managers. She earned her master's degree in social work from Columbia University, specializing in workplace matters / diversity and inclusion. Nikki is passionate about removing barriers to empower individuals to achieve their goals and thrive in their work environments.



Clarissa M. Rodriguez, Esq. is the Chair & Commissioner of the New York State Workers' Compensation Board, which administers workers' compensation, disability benefits, and Paid Family Leave insurance. During her time at the Board, Mrs. Rodriguez has led the agency through several important legislative reforms and implementations, including the launch of New York's landmark Paid Family Leave law, while also working to make significant improvements to the workers' compensation system. In 2023 NYS Governor Kathy Hochul reappointed Mrs. Rodriguez as Chair through 2029.

Before joining the Board in 2016, Mrs. Rodriguez worked as a litigator with the Legal Aid Society of NY and the Civil and Matrimonial Parts of the Nassau County Supreme Court. She also served with the Civil Rights Bureau of the NYS Office of the Attorney General, the City University of New York's (CUNY) Office of General Counsel, the Municipal Employees Legal Services (MELS) at District Council 37, and the Urban Justice Center, among others, prior to joining the Bar in 2007.

Mrs. Rodriguez has received numerous professional recognitions from the New York State Legislature, the Nassau County Executive, the New York State Bar Association, and other affinity Bars. Most recently she was awarded the AGA's 2024 Eleanor Clark Diversity Leadership Award in Washington D.C. She is part of the Governor's Interagency Statewide Workforce Group, and Latina Mentorship Initiative. She chairs the NYS Self-Insureds Association Advisory Committee and is a member of the Dominican Bar Association and the Hudson Valley Hispanic Bar Association. She is a Council on Legal Education Opportunity (CLEO) Fellow and is a graduate of CUNY School of Law. She holds a BA in Political Science and Women's Studies from SUNY Purchase College and lives in Orange County, NY with her husband and two daughters.



Steven Scotti has served as Executive Director of the New York State Workers' Compensation Board since September 2022. He was a practicing workers' compensation attorney for over 30 years, working exclusively in-house for New York self-insured employers, and dedicated to ensuring that injured co-workers promptly received all benefits to which they were legally entitled. Steven began his legal career in the public sector at the U.S. Department of Labor, followed by over 15 years of service with the New York City Law Department, where he served as Chief of the Workers' Compensation Division for the last seven years. He joined Con Edison in 2002, where he managed the workers' compensation practice in

its Law Department for over 16 years. Starting in 2013, Steven served for five years as Associate General Counsel for Labor, Employment, and Benefits, overseeing all labor and employment matters for the company. In 2019, he joined the Workers' Compensation Division of the New York City Transit Authority, serving as Deputy Executive Assistant General Counsel until leaving to join the Board. Steven has a BA in Political Science from Stony Brook University, and a JD with honors from New York Law School. He served on two Governor's workers' compensation task forces (Governor Spitzer's 2007 Rocket Docket Committee and Governor Paterson's 2010 Task Force on Group Self-Insurance). He is Co-Editor in Chief of the 2011 NYS Bar Association's *Workers' Compensation Law and Practice in New York*, and a frequent speaker on workers' compensation issues. In 2016, he was inducted as a Fellow in The College of Workers' Compensation Lawyers. Steven brings his years of study of the New York Workers' Compensation Law and expertise managing claims and legal operations at three of the state's largest self-insured employer programs to his current position. He strives to guide and improve the system for all stakeholders in furtherance of the Board's critical mission to serve injured workers and employers.



Misha Iokheles focuses his practice on defending workers' compensation claims. He represents carriers, self-insureds, and employers across a variety of industries, including construction, healthcare, hospitality, retail, and transportation. A large portion of his practice is devoted to litigating fraud and coverage issues for OCIPs in the construction space, where he has had tremendous success in obtaining favorable decisions. Known for his attention to detail and zealous advocacy, Misha is experienced in handling a variety of matters ranging from slip-and-fall claims to complex coverage disputes and occupational diseases. He is also known for meticulously investigating an injured worker's prior injuries and claims to identify alternative possible causes of the alleged injuries. In doing so, he is able to reduce his clients' exposure, whether it be through litigation or low-value settlements. While vigorously defending his clients' interests, Misha is also cognizant of the need to contain litigation costs and will always give clients an honest assessment of their chances of prevailing in litigation. Misha began his career as an underwriter for a prominent carrier, where he specialized in directors and officers, employment practices, fiduciary, crime, kidnap and ransom coverages. He then transitioned to a brokerage where he worked with various businesses and non-profit organizations to fulfill their insurance needs. His broad experience in the insurance industry provides Misha with an in-depth understanding of the challenges his clients face. Misha's education is as diverse as his professional experience. He obtained a B.C.L./LL.B after graduating with distinction from McGill University's Faculty of Law, where he studied both common and civil law and completed some of his coursework in French. He also spent a semester in Australia at Melbourne Law School and studied Talmudic Law in Israel at Machon Yaakov. Misha is fluent in Russian.



Michele Donovan, RWCS is a Workers' Compensation Specialist who manages the workers' compensation program for all US Cooper Companies from initial injury to closure with efforts focused on minimizing emotional and financial impact for both the employee and the company through open communication, partnering with our claims administrator and return-to-work coordination. Prior to joining Cooper Companies, she worked with both carriers and third party claims administrators with over 25 years experience handling multi-state workers' compensation claims. This has given her a unique perspective to see the claims process from every angle. Outside of work, Michele loves spending time with her family. She also volunteers for local animal rescues from adopting, to fundraising and now fostering. Michele is also passionate about her side gig with Signature Homestyles as a consultant recommending ways to update and organize your space and to help choose the perfect gift for any occasion.



Kristina Petry is a NYS licensed workers compensation Sr. Claims Adjuster and has spent the past 18 years working in the insurance industry. With FutureComp since 2018, Kristina's role consists of helping injured workers and clients navigate the complex and ever-changing claims process. As a team leader she oversees adjusters, providing mentorship, technical guidance, and support to ensure timely and effective claims resolutions. She works closely with leadership to develop strategies for continued improvement, streamlining workflows and promoting client expectations. Ms. Petry is currently President of the Buffalo Claims Association and a member of the Insurance Women of Buffalo. Kristina is a recipient of the USI 2022 Summit Award which she received in recognition of her achievements at FutureComp. Away from the office Kristina enjoys traveling, spending time outdoors, being with her family, attending local community events & festivals and putting around local golf courses. A proud supporter of her hometown teams, she is an enthusiastic fan of the Buffalo Bills and Buffalo Sabres.



Julie Tennant got her start in workers' compensation in 2001 and has worked on the TPA and self-insured employer side, currently serving as the Manager of U.S. Medical Services and Workers' Compensation for Eastman Kodak Company. Julie supports having a robust transitional duty/return-to-work program in place and believes that getting injured employees re-engaged in the workplace as soon as possible is instrumental in ensuring a successful return to work. Julie enjoys restoring her old home, cooking and coaching little league.



Timothy J. Kemperle is a Director Risk Management for UPS. Timothy joined UPS in 1984 as a Preloader and has held various positions within the organization over the past 40 years to include Operations, Human Resources, Health & Safety and Risk Management. He currently oversees Workers' Compensation and Auto Liability claims for East Zone. He is currently sits on the Board of the New York Self-Insures Association as well as a Director for New York Claims Association. He is a graduate of St. John's University with a BS in Management and a Master's Degree of Science in HR & Labor Relations from New York Institute of Technology.



Sheera Buckley is the Claim Specialist for Syracuse University. Sheera is the point of contact for all things workers' compensation at the University. She started her career at Syracuse University in 2002 managing the self insured and self administered New York State Disability Benefits program and acting as the back up for the workers' compensation position backup. In 2014 Sheera absorbed workers' compensation claims. She successfully to implemented a transitional duty program, getting injured workers back to work faster, or keeping employees at work after suffering an on the job injury. Sheera has also worked to identify and eliminate administrative barriers in the claims process. Sheera earned a Bachelor of Arts in Anthropology from Syracuse University and maintains a Certified Leave Specialist designation. Sheera currently sits on the Board of Managers for the New York Self Insurers Association.



James Cousins is a litigator and Partner at the Law Offices of Melissa A. Day, PLLC where he focuses his practice, and the bulk of his entire career, on the defense of employers in workers' compensation claims across all of New York state. LOMAD's entire practice is focused on defending carriers, TPAs, Group-Self-Insureds and Self-Insured Employers including both large private employers and local municipalities across all of New York State. James has experience litigating all issues that arise throughout a workers' compensation claim in New York: from "rocket docket" ANCR litigation to complex, multiparty Section 44 apportionment claims, and even dreaded UEF matters. James is recognized as one of the most formidable attorneys practicing workers' compensation defense, and has lectured frequently and won notable rulings including Matter of Yonkosky v Town of Hamburg, 2018 NY Slip Op 00586 Decided on February 1, 2018, Matter of Granica v Town of Hamburg, 2020 NY Slip Op 01542 Decided on March 5, 2020 and Matter of Miller v. MO Maier, (Docket 2022-00096, Decided January 6, 2022). James's family ran a small-business for almost sixty years; and he takes great pride and satisfaction in using his skills to defend employers across the state. James's wife – who is way smarter and far more interesting than he – is a professor of history at SUNY Buffalo specializing in disability and medical history in 19th century America; and together they have four daughters. When not working, James serves as a trustee of his church, and served as an officer in the New York State Guard where he holds the rank of Captain and has served as a staff officer (Personnel), and Detachment and Area Commander. James has deployed in support of natural disasters on several occasions, most recently at the outset of New York's military response to the COVID-19 pandemic.



Bridget Smith has over 20 years of experience as a former practicing attorney focusing on workers' compensation, general liability, and Medicare compliance law. Bridget is the head of the IMPAXX Settlement Consultant Team and works with customers in developing Medicare compliance programs to successfully navigate Medicare Secondary Payer issues. She is a frequent lecturer and has presented at RIMS, CLM and MSP Network on such topics as future medical allocations and Section 111 compliance. Bridget is a co-chair of the podcast committee for the MSP Network. She has a Bachelor of Arts degree from Gannon University and Master of Arts and Juris Doctorate degrees from Duquesne University.



Paul Zaragoza is the Chief of the New York City Law Department's Workers' Compensation Division, where he has previously served as Assistant Corporation Counsel, Senior Counsel, and Deputy Chief. As Chief, Paul oversees the operation of a division that handles all aspects of claim management for the City of New York, a self-insured and self-administered employer of over 250,000 covered employees. This includes an annual volume of approximately 18,000 claims, 18,000 administrative hearings, and 300,000 medical bills with a total expenditure exceeding \$650 million. His efforts have been previously recognized with the Law Department's "Legal Rookie of the Year" award, as an NYC Bar Association Municipal Affairs Award nominee, and as recipient of the Edith Spivack Special Recognition Award for Exceptional Performance. Paul currently sits on the Workers' Compensation Board Advisory Committee for Self-Insurance, the Board of Managers for the New York Self-Insurers Association, and is a Director for the New York Claims Association. He has spoken on various topics for the NYSIA and has represented them prior to the promulgation of the 2018 Impairment Guidelines. Paul received his undergraduate degree from American University and his Juris Doctorate from the Maurice A. Deane School of Law at Hofstra University, where he served as the Managing Editor of the Journal of International Business and Law. He and his wife, Laura, are proud parents to two wonderful children: Nuala and Ronan.