



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

January 24, 2017

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**AAKP ANNOUNCES 2017 MEDAL OF EXCELLENCE AWARD WINNERS**

**Tampa, FL** - The American Association of Kidney Patients (AAKP), America's largest independent and patient lead kidney advocacy organization, has announced the recipients of its 2017 Medal of Excellence. The award is the Association's highest honor for kidney health professionals and is designed to elevate national and international figures who have been in the forefront of scientific advances in kidney care and who are strong patient advocates.

"AAKP operates on a national strategy aimed at increasing patient engagement and advocacy through close alliances with health experts and highly credible institutions and organizations in the renal field. We are very proud to recognize individuals whose personal commitment to patient engagement, expanded care options and improved health outcomes is at the heart of every contribution they make to the larger kidney community," stated Paul T. Conway, AAKP President and a board member of the Kidney Health Initiative.

A selection committee comprised of highly renowned leaders in the renal community selected this year's honorees based on numerous nominations.

The 2017 honorees are:

**Special Recognition Category**

Celeste Lee, former Manager of the Institute for Patient and Family-Centered Care Programs at the University of Michigan, and a former Board Member and Chair of the Patient and Family Partnership Council for the Kidney Health Initiative (Greater Detroit Area, Michigan)

**Physician Category**

William E. Mitch, MD, Director of the Division of Nephrology at Baylor College of Medicine (Houston, Texas) and a Professor of Medicine at the Selzman Institute for Kidney Health (Houston, Texas)

**Nursing Category**

Helen Currier, BSN, RN, CNN, CENP, Director of Renal and Pheresis Services at Texas Children's Hospital and former President of the National Renal Administrators Association (NRAA), Philadelphia PA

**Social Work Category**

Mary Beth Callahan, ACSW, LCSW, Senior Social Worker at Dallas Transplant Institute and a former Chair of the National Kidney Foundation's Council of Nephrology Social Workers (Dallas, Texas)

**Dietitian Category**

Janelle Gonyea, RDN, LD, FNKF, Clinical Dietitian at Mayo Clinic Dialysis Services and Assistant Professor of Nutrition, College of Medicine (Rochester, Minnesota)

**Technician Category**

Philip M. Varughese, BS, CHT, Facility Administrator at DaVita, Inc. (Hillsborough, New Jersey)

The Medal of Excellence recipients will be recognized throughout the 2017 year. The first recognition event is the Medal of Excellence Award Dinner taking place on Friday, March 17, at the Omni Hotel in Nashville, Tennessee in conjunction with the Renal Physicians Association's (RPA) Annual Meeting. This event will recognize all Medal of Excellence Award winners. Tickets to attend the dinner may be purchased for \$125/each on the [AAKP website](#) or by calling 813-400-2395. Fellow colleagues, members of the renal community and RPA meeting attendees are encouraged to join in honoring the distinguished recipients and help the AAKP continue its mission to improve the quality of life for kidney patients through education, advocacy, and the fostering of patient communities.

For additional information on this year's award recipients, recognition events, or to sponsor the 2017 Medal of Excellence program, please visit <https://aakp.org/medal-of-excellence/> or contact Diana Clynes, Director of Programs and Services, at [dclynes@aakp.org](mailto:dclynes@aakp.org).

See below for additional information on the 2017 Medal of Excellence Award Honorees:

### **Celeste Lee**

Celeste is a 34 year patient of ESRD. She was on peritoneal dialysis, hemo dialysis, and had a transplant for 10 years. Celeste was the former Program Manager for Patient and Family Centered Care at the University of Michigan Health System where she provided leadership, strategy and implementation of Patient and Family Centered Care philosophies, practice and change. Including administrative and operational oversight for PFCC Program, Adult Services, peer mentor strategic coordination, quality, program development, education, performance improvement, research collaborations with stakeholders, and care models. Celeste was also a former Board Member and Chair of the Patient and Family Partnership Council for the Kidney Health Initiative. She was committed to helping health systems, academic medical centers, industry and others partner with patients and families to re-envision the future of healthcare. Celeste is convinced of the transformative power of collaborations between patients, families, staff, faculty, and community stakeholders to drive research forward.

### **Dr. William Mitch III**

Dr. William E. Mitch is the Gordon A. Cain Chair in Nephrology and the Director of the Division of Nephrology at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston, Texas. He received his undergraduate education at Harvard College and medical school education at Harvard Medical School. Dr. Mitch served as a Medical Intern, Resident and Chief Medical Resident at the Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston, interspersed with two years as a clinical research fellow at the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda. Sequentially, he joined the Faculties of Johns Hopkins School of Medicine, Harvard Medical School, Emory University School of Medicine, and the University of Texas Medical Branch before joining Baylor in 2005.

Dr. Mitch's clinical and scientific goals are to provide new methods to improve the diagnosis and treatment of metabolic consequences of chronic kidney disease. He has received several awards for his research: the Distinguished Achievement Award of the American Heart Association in 1996; the Robert Herman Award from the American Society of Nutrition in 1997; the Mary Jane Kugel Award from the JDRF in 1999; the David M. Hume Award from the National Kidney Foundation in 2001; the National Torchbearer Award from the American Kidney Fund in 2004; ASN's John P. Peters Award in 2009; Honorary Membership in the International Society of Nephrology in 2011; and the President's Award from SLANH in 2012. Dr. Mitch received a Merit Award from the NIH-NIDDK and has served on the NIDDK Advisory Council.

Dr. William E. Mitch, serves on the Medical Advisory Board of the American Association of Kidney Patients, and was elected to the ASN Council in 1999 after having served on a number of ASN Committees, including the Nominations Committee, the Training Program Committee and the Program Committee.

### **Helen Currier BSN, RN, CNN, CENP**

Ms. Currier is Director of Renal and Pheresis Services at Texas Children's Hospital and involved in clinical research on national and local levels. She is a graduate of the nursing research scholar's program at Texas Children's Hospital. Her research interests include pediatric renal replacement therapies, issues facing chronically ill children, quality of life for pediatric ESRD patients, healthcare environmental design, and the healing arts. She is a frequent presenter, and her publications include five chapters on pediatric nephrology nursing. She served as a consultant to the American Nephrology Nursing Association's (ANNA) revision of the Standards and Guidelines of Clinical Practice for Nephrology Nursing. Helen is a preeminent nursing figure in national professional groups and serves on the board of directors for the NRAA and the Society for the Arts in Healthcare.

### **Mary Beth Callahan ACSW, LCSW**

Ms. Callahan has been a kidney social worker since 1984 in dialysis and transplant. She belongs to the 27th Institute on Rehabilitation Issues, and is a previous Chair of the NKF Council of Nephrology Social Workers. Professional interests include rehab, quality of life, and end of life care. She works for Dallas Transplant Institute, a subsidiary of Dallas Nephrology Association, and holds a monthly Job Club promoting Social Security Administrative (SSA) work incentives and referrals to Vocational Rehabilitation (VR). In the past, she did research on impairment vs. disability, served on the Life Options Council, offered training for Texas VR counselors on ESRD, helped identify designated ESRD VR counselors in Dallas/Fort Worth, and promoted inclusion of rehabilitation in transplant assessment standard for Society of Transplant Social Workers.

### **Janelle Gonyea RDN, LD, FNKF**

Ms. Gonyea is currently a clinical dietitian at the Mayo Clinic Dialysis Services and Assistant Professor of Nutrition, College of Medicine in Rochester, Minnesota. She has worked in the Division of Nephrology and Hypertension for the more than 25 years. She received her Bachelors of Science degree from Michigan State University and completed her dietetic internship at Saint Mary's Hospital in Rochester. Janelle has authored several papers and given numerous presentations on the topic of renal nutrition. In her current role at the Mayo Clinic, she cares for patients doing both in-center hemodialysis and home dialysis. Janelle has also been a contributor to AAKP publications including dietetic reviewer for the AAKP Delicious! Recipe program and a number of educational articles featured in the aakpRENALIFE magazine.

### **Philip M. Varughese BS, CHT**

Mr. Varughese, has been a Facility Administrator for DaVita, Inc. for more than 18 years. In 2016, the unit achieved a 5 star ranking by CMS. He started his career as a dialysis technician in 1976, at Mount Sinai Medical Center Medical Center, NY. During his 50 year career, Philip has contributed to the advancement of the professional role of dialysis technicians by writing and contributing to several articles and publications that educated thousands worldwide. Philip served on the Board of Directors for AAKP from 1997-1999 and published several articles in *Dialysis and Transplantation*, *AAKP Renal Life*, and *Nephrology News and Issues*. From 1993-1994, he served on the Board of Directors for BONENT and currently serves as the international representative for BONENT. While there, Philip took an active involvement in NANT, NKF, and ESRD Network of NY, and served as the NANT National President in 1996-1997.

Philip is widely acknowledged in his field as a dialysis technology expert and advocate, and has received numerous recognitions over the years including the NANT Lifetime Achievement Award (2016), BONENT Presidential Award (1995), and has been recognized by DaVita at the national level for achieving excellent clinical performance in 2004 and 2005.

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Founded in 1969, AAKP is the largest and oldest independent kidney patient organization in America. Governed by a patient-majority Board of Directors, AAKP conducts national education programs designed to better inform kidney patients, care-givers and policy-makers about the true impacts of kidney disease, prevention efforts and treatment methods. AAKP executes a national advocacy strategy in conjunction with allied kidney organizations designed to insert the patient voice into proposed policies, research efforts and care deliberations before the Executive Branch and the U.S. Congress.