



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

November 9, 2020

MEDIA CONTACT:

Jennifer Duplessie
Marketing & Communications Manager
jduplessie@aakp.org
(813) 400-2394

KIDNEY ADVOCATES EARN PRESIDENT’S SERVICE AWARDS FOR COVID-19 EFFORTS

Tampa, FL: Today, the American Association of Kidney Patients (AAKP), the nation’s largest independent kidney patient organization and a global champion for patient care choice and treatment innovation, unveiled their inaugural President’s Volunteer Service Awards (PVSA) program by recognizing exceptional volunteers for their ongoing advocacy and response to the COVID-19 pandemic. AAKP is a [PVSA](#) authorized and certifying organization and the non-partisan program will honor volunteers who use their time and talents to solve some of the toughest challenges facing the nation. In 2019, AAKP launched [The Decade of the Kidney™](#), a strategic effort to organize kidney patient consumers nationally and globally to drive policies to prevent kidney injury and disease, support greater patient care choice, innovation, and timely access to care and new treatment options.

In 2020, AAKP volunteers accelerated the organization’s national and global reach through sophisticated virtual platforms, international patient group partnerships, clinical journal editorials, television, radio, social media, and a growing [Patient Ambassador Initiative](#). At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, AAKP changed all 2020 events to free virtual access, prioritized COVID-19 topics, and leveraged tactics to engage a wider audience. In the past eight months, AAKP has broadcasted expert COVID-19 insights through one [global](#) and two [national virtual events](#), a dozen [webinars](#), and launched advocacy campaigns to [highlight disparities](#) in minority and kidney patient representation in COVID-19 clinical trials and vaccine distribution protocols. Viewership for 2020 AAKP programs now exceeds 80,000 people across 70 countries and is growing rapidly. International and national program faculty has included 90 medical practitioners and researchers, and 60 patient experts. The [AAKP Global Summit on Kidney Innovations](#), conducted in partnership with the George Washington University School of Medicine and Health Sciences, alone reached over 20,000 patients and professionals worldwide in July of 2020.

“AAKP volunteers know the serious risks COVID-19 poses to Americans of all ages, its disproportionate impact among minorities and those with compromised immune systems, and the threat to those with underlying chronic conditions such as diabetes, heart, and kidney diseases. From the outset of the pandemic, AAKP leaders identified COVID-19 as a threat to both public health and the economy, understood disease prevention and a safe return to work are not mutually exclusive, and positioned the organization to work alongside NIH and CDC public health experts and frontline medical professionals to help control disease spread,” Diana Clynes, Executive Director of the American Association of Kidney Patients, said. Clynes continued, “AAKP has a clear-eyed view on the importance of masks and face coverings because kidney patients have first-hand experience managing health consequences many COVID-19 victims and their families confront such as heart damage, Acute Kidney Injury (AKI), dialysis, and the need for a kidney transplant. AAKP

rejects accusations medical professionals have overreacted to, or overinflated, the seriousness of COVID-19. Further, we view those who advocate for so-called herd immunity through the diminishment of COVID-19 consequences and basic pandemic public health prevention practices to be, at best, biased with good health and uninformed, and, at worst, reckless and devoid of empathy for Americans whose lives have been impacted or lost due to the virus.”

The PVSA was founded by President George W. Bush in the aftermath of the terror attacks of September 11, 2001, as one of several initiatives, including the President’s Council on Service and Civic Participation, designed to encourage and exemplify the strength of outstanding American volunteerism and community engagement. The awards program is non-partisan and has continued under successive presidential administrations. The PVSA program is led by [AmeriCorps](#) (formerly the Corporation for National and Community Service), an organization whose vision originated in the administration of President William J. Clinton, and it is managed in partnership with [Points of Light](#), an organization whose vision is rooted in the administration of President George H.W. Bush.

Presidential Volunteer Service Award Honorees

Gold Medal:

- **Richard Knight**, former dialysis patient, current transplant recipient; AAKP President; Member, National Institutes of Health/NIDDK Strategic Planning Committee; Member, NIH/NIDDK Kidney Precision Medicine Project Engagement Committee; Member, Scientific Registry of Transplant Recipients (SRTR) Visiting Committee; 2017 recipient, ASN President’s Medal.
- **Edward V. Hickey III**, USMC veteran, kidney patient; AAKP Vice President; Chair of AAKP Veterans Initiative (VHI); Reviewer, Department of Defense CDMRP; AAKP liaison, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs; Member, Judging Panel, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services/ASN KidneyX COVID-19 Kidney Care Challenge.
- **Paul T. Conway**, former dialysis patient, current transplant recipient; AAKP Chair of Public Policy and Global Affairs; AAKP Life Member; Co-Chair, AAKP/George Washington University Global Summit on Kidney Disease Innovations; Liaison, CDC Health Infection Control Practices Advisory Committee (HICPAC); Chair, FDA Patient Engagement Advisory Committee; Member, External Expert Panel, National Institutes of Health/NIDDK Kidney Precision Medicine Project; Member; Patient Advisory Committee, University of Washington Kidney Research Institute; 2017 recipient, ASN President’s Medal.
- **Steven Belcher, RN**, Founder of Urban Kidney Alliance and National Urban Radio Network; 2019 recipient of AAKP National Social Media Education and Advocacy Award.
- **Dr. Dominic Raj**, Director of the Division of Kidney Diseases and Hypertension, George Washington University School of Medicine and Health Sciences; Co-chair of AAKP/GWU Global Summit on Kidney Innovations; 2019 recipient, AAKP Peter Lundin, MD Award.
- **Dr. Stephen Fadem**, Clinical Professor of Medicine, Baylor College of Medicine, Section of Nephrology; Chair, AAKP Medical Advisory Board; AAKP Life Member; Recipient of AAKP’s Samuel J. Orenstein and Peter Lundin, MD Awards; AAKP Honorary Historian; recipient of AAKP Lifetime Achievement Award.

Silver Medal:

- **Kent Bressler, MA, RN**, U.S. Army veteran, pre-emptive transplant recipient; AAKP National Board of Director and National Ambassador; Reviewer, Department of Defense CDMRP; Co-founder of Kidney Solutions; and Host of Kent’s Kidney Stories Podcast series.

- **Brian Hess**, former in-center dialysis and peritoneal dialysis patient; former transplant recipient; current home hemodialysis patient; Member, AAKP National Board of Director; Member, AAKP Public Policy Committee; recipient AAKP Samuel Orenstein Award (2012) and AAKP National Patient Engagement and Advocacy Award (2018).
- **Dr. Muralidharan Jagadeesan**, Associate Professor of Medicine in the Division of Renal Diseases and Hypertension and Chairman of Transplant Medicine and the Medical Director of Kidney-Pancreas Transplant Program at the George Washington School of Medicine and Health Sciences; Faculty and Planning Committee Member, of AAKP/GWU Global Summit on Kidney Innovations.
- **Jennifer Jones**, USMC veteran, former dialysis patient, current transplant recipient; AAKP National Board of Director and National Ambassador; 2019 recipient of AAKP National Social Media Education and Advocacy Award.
- **Dr. Janice Lea**, Professor of Medicine at Emory University; CMO of Emory Dialysis; AAKP National Board of Director; 2019 recipient of AAKP Samuel J. Orenstein Award; Principal Investigator, AAKP PCORI Engagement Awards.
- **James Myers**, former dialysis patient, current transplant recipient; AAKP National Board of Director and National Ambassador; Chair of AAKP Strategic Communications Committee; Chair of AAKP Pediatric Kidney Pals Initiative; 2015 recipient of Inaugural AAKP National Social Media Education and Advocacy Award.
- **Glenda Roberts**, former dialysis patient; current transplant recipient; Director, External Relations and Patient Engagement for the Kidney Research Institute (KRI); AAKP National Ambassador; Member, Patient Advisory Board for Center for Dialysis Innovation; former Executive Director, Transplant House.
- **David Rodriguez**, former dialysis patient, current transplant recipient; Patient Specialist, University Transplant Center San Antonio; AAKP National Board of Director and National Ambassador; member of AAKP Public Policy Committee.
- **Dale Rogers**, former dialysis patient, current transplant recipient; AAKP National Board of Director and National Ambassador; member of AAKP Programs/Development Committee.
- **Suzanne Ruff**, living organ donor; author, *The Reluctant Donor*; freelance writer, Charlotte Observer; AAKP National Board of Director and National Ambassador.
- **Lana Schmidt, MBA**, former home hemodialysis patient; current transplant recipient; AAKP National Board of Director and National Ambassador; Member, AAKP Strategic Communications Committee.
- **Dr. Rebecca Schmidt**; Professor and Section Chief, J.W. Ruby Memorial Hospital, West Virginia University School of Medicine; Past President, Renal Physicians Association (RPA); Member, AAKP Medical Advisory Board; 2018 recipient, AAKP Medal of Excellence Award.
- **Dr. Barry Smith**, Founder, Dreyfus Health Policy and Research Center; former President/CEO, The Rogosin Institute; Member, AAKP Board of Directors.
- **Nancy Uhland, NP**, Program Manager, Dreyfus Health Policy & Research Center; former Nurse Practitioner, The George Washington University School of Medicine and Health Sciences; 2018 AAKP Medal of Excellence recipient.

Bronze Medal:

- **Dan Abel**, former dialysis patient, current transplant recipient; small business owner and entrepreneur; AAKP Secretary; AAKP Life Member.
- **Meshia Adams**, former dialysis patient, current transplant recipient, AAKP National Ambassador, researcher/administrator for The Renal Patient Support Network (UK-based).
- **Melissa Bensouda**, former transplant recipient, current home hemodialysis patient, AAKP National Ambassador.

- **Lisa Garner**, former dialysis patient, current transplant recipient, AAKP National Board of Director; Member, AAKP Programs/Development Committee; 2020 Co-chair, AAKP National Patient Meeting.
- **Katina Lang-Lindsey, PhD, LMSW**; former dialysis patient, current transplant recipient, Assistant Professor, A&M University; AAKP National Ambassador; 2020 recipient, AAKP Patient Safety Award.
- **Dammeon Marshall**, MSW; kidney disease patient; Self-Employed/Entrepreneur; AAKP National Ambassador.
- **Sharron Rouse**, former dialysis patient, current transplant recipient; AAKP National Ambassador; Founder, Kindness for Kidneys International; 2020 recipient of AAKP Support Group of the Year Award; Co-Chair 2020 AAKP National Patient Meeting.
- **Patrick O. Gee, Sr.**, former dialysis patient; current transplant recipient; AAKP National Board of Director and National Ambassador; Member, Patient Advisory Council, Patient and Family Centered Care Partners of the Kidney Health Initiative (KHI).
- **Bob Abbott**, caregiver; Charter Member, Arkansas Kidney Disease Commission; AAKP Life Member; recipient, AAKP Samuel J. Orenstein Award (2011); recipient, 2019 AAKP National Patient Engagement and Advocacy Award.

###

About the American Association of Kidney Patients (AAKP): From 1969-1973, AAKP patients led efforts in the U.S. Congress and before White House officials to establish the End Stage Renal Disease Program, which has saved over a million U.S. lives through modern dialysis coverage. In 2018, AAKP launched KIDNEY VOTERS, the first and largest annual voter registration and turnout drive for kidney patients and their allies. In 2019, AAKP announced the start of the [Decade of the Kidney™](#) upon the signing of the White House *Executive Order on Advancing American Kidney Health Initiative*. For more information, visit www.aakp.org. Follow AAKP on social media at [@kidneypatient](#) on Facebook and [@kidneypatients](#) on Twitter/Instagram.