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**KIDNEY PROFESSIONALS NAMED AS 2021 MEDAL OF EXCELLENCE AWARD WINNERS**

*America's Largest Independent Kidney Patient Organization Recognizes Top Professionals*

**Tampa, FL** - The American Association of Kidney Patients (AAKP), America's oldest and largest independent, patient-led kidney advocacy organization, has announced recipients of its 2021 Medal of Excellence. The award is one of the Association's highest honors for kidney healthcare professionals. It is designed to elevate local, national, and international figures who have been at the forefront of advancements in kidney care and patient empowerment.

"As AAKP enters its second year of the Decade of the Kidney™ (2020-2030) Initiative, we are honored to recognize those professionals who are committed to improving and extending the lives of all kidney patients. These professionals use research, technology, innovation, and quality treatments to increase patient care choices. Patient choice allows patients to select care that is a better fit for their goals and ambitions. It also allows patients to live, work, and contribute to society," states Richard Knight, AAKP President, former in-center dialysis patient, and current kidney transplant recipient.

"AAKP's national strategy is designed to increase patient engagement and advocacy through alliances with credible experts and organizations, and our 2021 Medal of Excellence recipients exceed the highest levels of professional excellence from the patient viewpoint and are superb representatives for their respective fields," said Edward V. Hickey, III, USMC (ret), AAKP Vice President, and Chair of AAKP Veterans Health Initiative.

A review committee selected this year's honorees based on numerous nominations. The award program recognizes a variety of professionals, including physician, transplant surgeon, transplant professional, nurse, social worker, dietitian, dialysis technician, and special recognition in research and policy—awardees will be recognized at various virtual events hosted throughout the year in front of a community of their peers.

**The 2021 honorees are:**

- Janice Lea, MD, MSC, FASN (Atlanta, GA) - **Physician Category**
- Michael Alan Rees, MD, PhD (Toledo, OH) – **Transplant Surgeon Category**
- Emily A. Blumberg, MD, FACP, FIDSA, FAST (Philadelphia, PA) – **Transplant Professional Category**
- Lillian Pryor, MSN, RN, CNN (Lawrenceville, GA) – **Nursing Category**
- Shannon Wright, BSW (Raleigh, NC) – **Social Work Category**

- Katy Wilkens, MS, RD (Seattle, WA); Jessie Pavlinac, MS, RD, CSR, LD (Portland, OR); and Kathy Schiro Harvey, MS, RD, CSR (Everett, WA) – **Dietetic Category**
- Brenda Rickards, CHT, CCHT-A, FNKF (Columbia, SC) – **Dialysis Technician Category**
- Barry H. Smith, PhD, MD (New York, NY) – **Special Recognition: Research & Policy**

“This year’s honorees are not only exemplary in their own right, but have also contributed significantly to many of AAKP’s 2020 efforts by accelerating the organization’s national and global reach where the Association reached over 80,000 individuals across 70 countries via its 2020 virtual events alone,” states Paul T. Conway, AAKP Chair of Policy and Global Affairs. “Many of this year’s Medal of Excellence Award recipients are also prior honorees of [AAKP’s inaugural Presidential Volunteer Service Award program](#) for their ongoing advocacy and response to the COVID-19 pandemic.”

AAKP is proud to recognize such deserving individuals whose individual career achievements set an example of the best in patient-centered care. The 2021 honorees represent every sector of the renal community and demonstrate the profound impact each member of the healthcare team has on patient outcomes, quality of life, and helping those affected by chronic kidney disease achieve their aspirations.

**Medal of Excellence 2021 recognition events\* (virtual):**

- **American Society of Transplant Surgeons Winter Symposium** (January 16): Honoring Dr. Michael Alan Rees during the ASTS Awards Ceremony.
- **Northwest Renal Dietitian Annual Conference** (March 4-5): Honoring Katy Wilkens, MS, RD; Jessie Pavlinac, MS, RD, CSR, LD; and Kathy Schiro Harvey, MS, RD, CSR.
- **National Association of Nephrology Technicians Dialysis Tech ConneXion Annual Conference** (March 15-18): Honoring Brenda Rickards CHT, CCHT-A, FNKF during the State of the NANT Address.
- **American Nephrology Nurses Association** (May 2-5): Honoring Lillian Pryor, MSN, RN, CNN.
- **American Transplant Congress** (June 5-9): Honoring Emily A. Blumberg, MD, FACP, FIDSA, FAST during the American Society of Transplantation Town Hall.

*\*Additional virtual events recognizing remaining award recipients will be announced as details are confirmed.*

For additional information on this year’s award recipients, virtual recognition events hosted by AAKP allies, or to sponsor the 2021 Medal of Excellence program, please visit <https://aakp.org/programs-and-events/medal-of-excellence/> or contact Erin Kahle, Director of Stakeholder Operations, [ekahle@aakp.org](mailto:ekahle@aakp.org) or (813) 400-2393.

**Please consider joining us for AAKP’s 2021 FREE virtual events—register today!**

- **3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Global Summit on Kidney Disease Innovation** (hosted in partnership with The George Washington University School of Medicine and Health Sciences), May 13-14: [bit.ly/AAKPGlobalSummit2021](https://bit.ly/AAKPGlobalSummit2021)
- **4<sup>th</sup> Annual AAKP Policy Summit**, June 17: [bit.ly/AAKPPolicySummit2021](https://bit.ly/AAKPPolicySummit2021)
- **46<sup>th</sup> Annual AAKP National Patient Meeting**, September 24-25: [bit.ly/AAKPPatientMeeting2021](https://bit.ly/AAKPPatientMeeting2021)

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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, caregivers, and policymakers 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.

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