5 physicians honored for work with underserved populations

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To stand out as physicians for exceptional work in community engagement, leadership and dedication to helping underserved populations—all tenets that most every practitioner holds dear—takes extraordinary effort.

As recent recipients of the Excellence in Medicine Awards, awarded by the AMA Foundation, five physicians were honored for putting forth such efforts during the 2018 AMA Annual Meeting in Chicago.

The five honorees were: Francis Gregory Samonte, MD; Tina R. Shah, MD, MPH; Scott Kellermann, MD; Thea James, MD; and Divo A. Messori, MD.

About the recipients

Dr. Samonte: Awarded the Dr. Debasish Mridha Spirit of Medicine Award for working with distressed or marginalized populations, Dr. Samonte’s outreach efforts with underserved patient populations are extensive. In 2010, he found himself working at the epicenter in Leogane, Haiti after their catastrophic earthquake. Dr. Samonte then decided serve in the Philippines, where he has committed his services to the Aeta indigenous people living in remote, isolated communities.

Dr. Shah: 2018 was the inaugural year for the Dr. Edmond and Rima Cabbabe Dedication to the Profession Award, presented to a physician who demonstrates productive improvement to the profession through community service.

Dr. Shah has held numerous national leadership roles to advance provider and patient well-being, including as past Chair of the AMA Resident and Fellow Section, and currently at the National Academy of Medicine. Dr. Shah received her MD from Sidney Kimmel Medical College and her MPH from Harvard University.
**Dr. Kellerman:** The Dr. Nathan Davis International Award in Medicine recognizes a physician whose influences extend beyond U.S. borders to conduct meaningful work with international patient populations. Dr. Kellermann was moved to help the Batwa Pygmies of the Bwindi Impenetrable Forest after completing a medical survey of the population in 2000. At that time the community had a life expectancy of 28.

With his family, Dr. Kellerman relocated to Uganda to establish the Bwindi Community Hospital. The facility has evolved into a 125 bed hospital along with a student nursing school and numerous public health programs, which have reduced the prevalence of malaria in the community by over 90 percent.

**Dr. James:** The Pride in the Profession Award honors a physician for extraordinary patient care work. As founder of the nonprofit Unified for Global Healing—which has implemented longstanding programs that support patient health in Haiti, India and Ghana—Dr. James fits the bill.

She has been a member of the Boston Disaster Medical Assistance Team since 2000. Through this program she has provided emergency medical care to victims of the Sept. 11 attacks in New York, Hurricane Katrina, and the earthquakes in Bam, Iran and Port-Au-Prince, Haiti.

**Dr. Messori:** The Jack B. McConnell, MD, Award for Excellence in Volunteerism recognizes the work of senior physicians who provide treatment to U.S. patients who lack access to health care. Dr. Messori has been volunteering at the Cape Volunteers in Medicine clinic since 2010, where he focuses on the care of Hepatitis C in the community. He goes to great lengths to provide medications at no cost to his patients as well as training all nurses and primary care teams at the clinic in treatment protocols and ongoing monitoring for those patients.