How these 6 physicians are making a difference in medicine

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Recognized for their altruism, advocacy and professional skill, six physicians were honored by the AMA Foundation with the 2022 Excellence in Medicine Awards.

Recipients of the 2022 honors—in addition to those who won Excellence in Medicine Awards in 2021 but could not get them in person last year—were honored in a ceremony Saturday night at the 2022 AMA Annual Meeting. First, here are the 2022 physician honorees.

Jerry P. Abraham, MD, MPH, CMQ

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Dr. Abraham was given the Dr. Debasish Mridha Spirit of Medicine Award, which recognizes the work of U.S. physicians who demonstrate altruism, compassion, integrity, leadership and personal sacrifice while providing quality health care to destitute, distressed or marginalized population in impoverished communities.
Dr. Abraham, an AMA member, serves as an advocate for equal access to public health and health care for people across Los Angeles. As director of Kedren Vaccines, he has fully repositioned the health care organization to serve as the lead responder for COVID-19 testing, vaccinations and therapeutics, providing more than 450,000 tests and more than 300,000 vaccines with a keen focus on South Los Angeles, earning international and national acclaim.

Joanna Turner Bisgrove, MD

Dr. Bisgrove earned the Dr. Edmond and Rima Cabbabe Dedication to the Profession Award, which recognizes physicians who demonstrate active and productive improvement to the profession of medicine through community service, advocacy, leadership, teaching or philanthropy.

Dr. Bisgrove, an AMA member, is a family physician and assistant professor of family medicine at Rush University Medical Center in Chicago. She has participated in several health advocacy organizations and volunteers with The Trotter Project, a school-based farm-to-table program that educates youth on healthy eating, sustainability and careers in agriculture and hospitality. Dr. Bisgrove is passionate about gender equity for women in medicine and disability inclusion.
Given the Pride in the Profession Award for physicians whose lives encompass the true spirit of being a medical professional through extraordinary patient care, Dr. Bristow is a physician and advocate with more than 50 years of experience. In 1995, he was elected president of the AMA—the first Black person to hold the position.

A pioneer in health care equity and policy reform, Dr. Bristow is an AMA member who has dedicated his career to ethical and socioeconomic issues such as the mistreatment of sickle cell anemia, the tobacco industry’s effect on public health, the death penalty, and HIV/AIDS.
Dr. Blackstock is one of three honorees to get the Excellence in LGBTQ Health Award, which goes to physicians, residents, fellows and final-year medical students who have demonstrated outstanding work, innovation and leadership in LGBTQ+ policy, advocacy, patient care, academics, workforce diversity or health care administration. Dr. Blackstock is recognized as a thought leader and influencer in health equity.

She is a primary care and HIV physician and the founder and executive director of Health Justice, a health equity consulting firm that helps health care and public health organizations center anti-racism and equity in the workplace and reduce health inequities in the communities they serve.

Jason Schneider, MD

Also recognized with the Excellence in LGBTQ Health Award, Dr. Schneider is an associate professor at the Emory University School of Medicine in Atlanta. He also works in the Division of General Internal Medicine at Grady Memorial Hospital.

His clinical interests include sexual health and sexuality, the interaction of psychiatry and general medicine, and primary care for LGBTQ+ patients.

Dr. Schneider played a vital role in the development of the Grady Memorial Hospital Gender Center, a clinic for transgender and gender diverse patients.
Dustin Nowaskie, MD

The third honoree to be celebrated with an Excellence in LGBTQ Health Award, Dr. Nowaskie is a queer, nonbinary fourth-year psychiatry resident at the Indiana University School of Medicine. Dr. Nowaskie’s personal identification and civic commitment have cultivated into a passion to help the LGBTQ+ community.

Dr. Nowaskie is the founder and president of the national nonprofit health equity organization OutCare Health, which gives patients access to LGBTQ+ physicians and other health professionals, as well as health care resources, mentorship and medical education reform.

2021 winners include 5 physicians

Winners of the 2021 Excellence in Medicine also were honored at the event, including these physicians below.
Jorge Cavero, MD

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Winner of the 2021 Pride in the Profession Award, Dr. Cavero is founder and chief medical officer of the Cavero Clinic—the largest community center in Illinois serving the Latinx community. Latinx is a gender-neutral term to describe people with Latin American heritage.

For more than 20 years, Dr. Cavero has been instrumental in helping build the Hispanic Center of Excellence at the University of Illinois Chicago College of Medicine into a leading educator of Latinx physicians.

Clay Lowder, MD

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Dr. Lowder, an AMA member, was honored with the 2021 Dr. Debasish Mridha Spirit of Medicine Award. A family physician in Sumter, South Carolina, Dr. Lowder is the founder of Colonial Healthcare, one of the largest primary care groups in the state.

An author of two books, Dr. Lowder aims to change lives mentally, physically and spiritually by speaking, writing and counseling. He also established the Winners Travel Foundation, which awards all-expense paid trips to caregivers of veterans and children with special needs.

Dennis Saver, MD

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The Jack B. McConnell, MD, Award for Excellence in Volunteerism honors senior physicians who are committed to providing medical care to those without access to health care in the U.S. The 2021 recipient, Dr. Saver was a staunch advocate for providing health care access to uninsured and low-income individuals.

He founded Primary Care of the Treasure Coast in Vero Beach, Florida, spending more than 30 years delivering care to thousands of patients. He also was instrumental in the development of We Care, a free clinic for uninsured, low-income patients. Dr. Saver died in 2021. He was 68.

URL: https://www.ama-assn.org/about/awards/how-these-6-physicians-are-making-difference-medicine
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Honored with the 2021 Dr. Edmond and Rima Cabbabe Dedication to the Profession Award, Dr. Templeton, an AMA member, is professor of orthopaedic surgery at the University of Kansas Medical Center and department vice-chair for diversity, equity and inclusion.

She was the first McCann Professor of Women in Medicine and Science in the U.S. She is a past-president American Medical Women’s Association and the first orthopaedic surgeon to lead the organization. She is a member of the AMA Foundation LGBTQ+ Fellowship Commission.
The recipient of the 2021 Excellence in LGBTQ Health Award, Dr. Valenti, an AMA member, is an infectious diseases specialist, who has been practicing HIV medicine, policy and research, and sexual health since the early 1980s.

He co-founded Trillium Health, a specialty program for HIV care in Rochester, New York, and oversees programs focused on ending the AIDS epidemic and supporting LGBTQ+ public health and equity.

**Former AMA general counsel honored**

The AMA Foundation also introduced a new honor, the Dr. Jacqueline A. Bello Friend of the AMA Foundation Award, which goes to AMA staff, donors and volunteers for their active engagement and unwavering support of the foundation. The inaugural recipient this year is Brian Vandenberg, who served as the AMA’s general counsel from February 2017 to March 2022.

Vandenberg is now chief administrative officer and general counsel at Homeward, a company committed to improving access to high-quality, comprehensive health care in rural communities. Vandenberg has generously supported several diverse AMA Foundation scholarship programs through the Vandenberg Health Equity Fund.

This video profiling the AMA Foundation’s work was shown at the AMA House of Delegates on June 10.

Read about the other highlights from the 2022 AMA Annual Meeting.

*Editor’s note: This story was updated in late June to note the physician winners of the 2021 Excellence in Medicine Awards. We regret the oversight.*