



American Academy of Nursing Recognizes Outstanding Individuals for Advancing Health Equity and Improving Care

Prestigious Honors Will Be Awarded During the Academy's Virtual Policy Conference

Washington, DC (October 27, 2020) – The American Academy of Nursing (Academy) will honor **Rear Admiral Susan Orsega**, MSN, FNP-BC, FAANP, FAAN, **Stephanie Ferguson**, PhD, RN, FNAP, FAAN, **Sheila Burke**, MPA, RN, FAAN, **Millicent Gorham**, MBA, FAAN, and **Patrick DeLeon**, PhD, JD, MPH, FAAN during the virtual 2020 [Transforming Health, Driving Policy conference](#) occurring October 29-31, 2020, for their outstanding contributions improving health and health care.



The **President's Award**, which recognizes an individual who has made extraordinary, lifelong contributions to improving the health of individuals, families, or communities, will be presented to **Rear Admiral Susan Orsega**. This is the highest individual achievement award given by the Academy and only awarded when someone has been identified as being truly appropriate for the honor, such as RADM Orsega, whose distinguished career epitomizes public service in the pursuit of global health where the wellness of individuals and communities is paramount. COVID-19 is not the only public health crisis RADM Orsega has faced, she has extensive experience in responding to public health emergencies ranging from the HIV/AIDS epidemic to the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks to the Ebola outbreak, as well as, 14 other national and international disaster and humanitarian deployments over the course of three decades. Her leadership, especially in directing the on-the-ground coordination of the US Public Health Service Commissioned Corps' response during the coronavirus pandemic, is admirable.

"Rear Admiral Orsega is the embodiment of a true public servant and an ideal leader," said Dr. Sullivan-Marx. "We are honored to have her as a Fellow of the Academy and the recipient of this year's President's Award and recognize her remarkable success in directing teams through crisis."



Stephanie Ferguson, Founder, CEO and President of Stephanie L. Ferguson & Associates, a Visiting Fellow at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, and Consulting Associate Professor at Stanford University, will be presented with this year's **Civitas Award**. The award recognizes an individual who exemplifies extraordinary dedication to excellence in promoting quality care. Internationally renowned, Dr. Ferguson has worked in over 100 countries as a technical advisor, consultant, and facilitator for organizations, including the World Health Organization and the International Council of Nurses, to evaluate care delivery systems, population health outcomes, and leadership programs. For over 20 years at the World Health Organization's headquarters and regional offices, Dr. Ferguson developed strategic plans and initiatives to strengthen and evaluate global health care delivery systems, population health outcomes, and leadership programs for health professionals. Dr. Ferguson helped steward the Consensus Study on Global Health and the Future of the USA at the National Academy of Medicine, which is foundational to health policy today.

"Dr. Ferguson's selfless career championing the voice of nursing and improving health outcomes has left an enduring impact on the future of health care," said Dr. Sullivan-Marx. "There is no one more

deserving of this year's award, Dr. Ferguson is a true leader with a steadfast commitment to the patients nurses serve."



The Academy is pleased to present **Sheila Burke** with the **Health Care Leader Award** in recognition of her impact in shaping health policy. Created in 2008, this award recognizes an influential national leader dedicated to improving the health of the nation through contributions to organizational excellence. Ms. Burke currently serves as Chair of the Baker Donelson Government Relations and Public Policy Group and as faculty at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. Throughout her career, Ms. Burke has served in a variety of prominent leadership roles, including as Chief of Staff to former Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole, Deputy Staff Director of the Senate Finance Committee, Secretary of the Senate, and Deputy Secretary and Chief Operating Officer of the Smithsonian Institution. Ms. Burke leveraged her expertise to help advance key legislative issues related to Medicare, Medicaid, and the Maternal and Child Health programs. Over the course of her career, her dedication to placing the patient first has benefited countless lives, families, and communities, inspiring a generation of nurses to pursue policy careers.

"Sheila Burke is a fierce champion whose work has resulted in a lifetime of advocacy to elevate the voice of patients and for improved health and health equity," said Academy President Eileen Sullivan-Marx. "Her illustrious career has had an incredible impact on health policies at the local, state, and federal levels. We are so pleased to present her with the Health Care Leader Award."



Additionally, the Academy will present **Millicent Gorham**, Executive Director of the National Black Nurses Association (NBNA), with the **Outstanding Leadership Award**. This distinction recognizes an Honorary Fellow for exemplary service and perseverance as a champion of nurses and the profession. This year marks the 25th year of her tenure leading NBNA, which represents over 200,000 African American nurses in the US. Dr. Gorham utilizes her extensive policy experience to support advancements in health equity and advocate on behalf of Black nurses across the country. Under her leadership, NBNA has significantly expanded its influence through an increase in membership and scholarship awards. Under Ms. Gorham's leadership she has helped enact a key priority for the organization during the pandemic, supporting the profession on the front lines by partnering with national organizations and corporations to provide free hotel rooms, sneakers, and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for nurses.

"In a year that has been filled with challenges, Dr. Gorham has authentically led NBNA in its pandemic response while supporting the communities most impacted by the virus," said Dr. Sullivan-Marx. "Her genuine dedication to the people and organization she serves makes her incredibly deserving of this award."



The Academy will present **Patrick DeLeon** with the **Lifetime Legacy Award**, created in 2019 to recognize an extraordinary individual who has dedicated their life to advocating for positive health system changes. Dr. DeLeon began his career as a Peace Corps volunteer in Hawaii before working at the Hawaii Department of Mental Health. He then transitioned to policy work, first as an intern for Senator Daniel Inouye and then after 40 years of service, retired as his Chief of Staff. During his tenure with Senator Inouye, Dr. DeLeon was a fierce advocate for improving care for children and families, advancing changes for mental health services, and ensuring that healthcare professionals could

practice to the full extent of their education. He helped to spearhead countless legislation to support nurses, most significantly, the establishment of the National Center for Nursing Research, and later the National Institute of Nursing Research within the National Institutes of Health. Dr. DeLeon is a strong supporter of future health policy scholars as demonstrated through his roles at the Uniformed Services University, Vanderbilt University, George Washington University and the University of Hawaii in Hilo and Manoa.

“It is an honor to present Dr. DeLeon with the second Lifetime Legacy Award ever granted by the Academy,” said Dr. Sullivan-Marx. “A genuine leader and a true friend of nursing, the lasting impact of his work can be seen through the care improvements in areas ranging from mental health to children’s emergency services. He is a fierce advocate for, and policy expert in, quality healthcare reform.”

These incredible leaders will be recognized during the American Academy of Nursing’s virtual [*Transforming Health, Driving Policy Conference*](#) taking place this October 29-31.

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About the American Academy of Nursing

[The American Academy of Nursing](#) serves the public by advancing health policy and practice through the generation, synthesis, and dissemination of nursing knowledge. Academy Fellows are inducted into the organization for their extraordinary contributions to improve health locally and globally. With more than 2,700 Fellows, the Academy represents nursing’s most accomplished leaders in policy, research, administration, practice, and academia.

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