The ASCO Humanitarian Award

Honoring Doctors Who Make a World of Difference in Cancer Care

The *ASCO Humanitarian Award* recognizes a cancer doctor, called an oncologist, who personifies ASCO's mission and values by going above and beyond the call of duty in providing outstanding patient care through innovative means or exceptional service or leadership in the United States or abroad. It is presented to an ASCO member who distinguishes himself/herself through voluntary and non-compensated humanitarian endeavors.

2012 ASCO Humanitarian Award Recipient Announced

ASCO is pleased to announce that Edith Peterson Mitchell, MD, FACP, will receive the *ASCO Humanitarian Award* for her dedication and compassion in both her professional work and free time, which has touched the lives of countless individuals. Dr. Mitchell is a clinical professor in the departments of Medicine and Medical Oncology as well as program leader of Gastrointestinal Oncology at Jefferson Medical College of Thomas Jefferson University, associate director for Diversity Programs for the Kimmel Cancer Center (KCC) at Jefferson, and director of the KCC Center to Eliminate Cancer Disparities. In addition to her professional roles, she has spent many years in service with the U.S. Air Force and the Air National Guard. For her efforts, Dr. Mitchell will be presented with this year's ASCO Humanitarian Award during the Opening Session of the ASCO Annual Meeting on Saturday, June 2.

Acts of humanitarianism take countless forms. Dr. Mitchell believes it is up to the individual to define his or her own personal needs and abilities when assisting others. ?Everyone can determine for themselves where and how they want contribute,? Dr. Mitchell said. In the context of her own medical background, she said ?there is nothing like assisting individuals who have no access to care, who have no opportunities for health.?

Building upon her everyday work in the medical field and expanding it to a larger community, Dr. Mitchell has helped individuals in medically underserved areas to realize that simple changes in lifestyle can have a dramatic effect on cancer care. She has participated in flood relief, supportive patient advocacy, and organized vaccination clinicsâ€"all for individuals who might not have the means to seek out more conventional medical advice.

During the 1993 flood that devastated areas of Mississippi and Missouri, Dr. Mitchell led a team of volunteers who set up microbiology laboratories in key areas so that well water could be tested for harmful bacteria and agents. Dr. Mitchell and her team tested over 1,000 water samples throughout Mississippi because the state's microbiology lab was underwater. In the city of St. Louis, Dr. Mitchell and her team ?worked endlessly? to administer hepatitis vaccines and provide potable water to individuals.

Stemming from these activities, Dr. Mitchell was named State Air Surgeon for Missouri and was put in charge of Air Force volunteers and setting up guidelines for resources and medical care. She also worked with the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services administering immunizations for children as well as performing physical examinations. She explained that many of the children she encountered had very little access to medical care and limited resources. One such patient was a 14-year-old girl who came to one of the free clinics for an athletic-participation examination with hypertension and was found to have a kidney tumor.

Dr. Mitchell was able to have the girl transferred to the University of Missouri, where surgeons performed the necessary operation free of charge. ?Working with children is really very important?€"as is working with individuals who are motivated but who are poor and just don't have resources,? she said.

Her work with children in underserved regions served two benefits, explained Dr. Mitchell. First, it gave those in the National Guard who were preparing for deployment for military purposes experience in dealing with physical examinations and illness. Second and ?more importantly, it allowed us to give to individuals,? she said. As a result of these efforts, Dr. Mitchell and her team were recognized by then-Missouri Governor Melvin

Eugene Carnahan.

Other efforts in which Dr. Mitchell provided access to care to underserved populations include her work at a volunteer clinic within a large remote farming population. Consisting mostly of immigrants and farmers, the population was found to have a high rate of sickle cell disease incidence. Patients were seen at the University of Missouri for sickle cell care. Because the clinic was located six hours away from her home, Dr. Mitchell would drive the evening before, see patients the next day, and then drive back home in the evening. When then-Missouri Governor Roger B. Wilson heard about these extraordinary efforts, he facilitated for Dr. Mitchell and her team the use of faster, private transportation so they could more easily carry out their duties.

?Working with individuals who try to provide medical care to people who don't have access to care has been a big part of my professional life,? she said. Furthermore, ?Volunteering for these clinics has been so important because there are so many individuals who want medical care but don't have access to it, and they are so appreciative for what we can do for them.?

Dr. Mitchell attributes the biggest reward of her work to seeing individuals benefit from her time â€" seeing them access top-level medical care that they never would have received without these volunteer efforts. She is also pleased to see that her humanitarian efforts have inspired her family, who in their own way has contributed to the community and to underserved populations. For example, Dr. Mitchell's children collected toys for children affected by the floods. ?We went out and picked up bottles on the highway, turned the rubbish in to the city for a fee, then used the money to buy toys for the kids,? she said. Opportunities for outreach and community improvement are available for anyone interested, Dr. Mitchell explained. Her recommendation is simple: find your passion and contribute through that.

More Information

Learn about Dr. Mark Kris [1], recipient of the 2011 *ASCO Humanitarian Award*

Doctor Stories [2]

The Oncologist's Perspective [3]

Types of Oncologists [4]

Last Updated: March 20, 2012

Links:
[1] http://www.cancer.net/node/24591
[2] http://www.cancer.net/node/24944
[3] http://www.cancer.net/node/27496
[4] http://www.cancer.net/node/25356