

History of the Tony Winsor Award

Attorney Tony Winsor worked for Massachusetts Law Reform Institute and dedicated his 39 years of practice to advocating for the disadvantaged. Attorney Winsor worked endlessly on many cases and battles, but the battle most near and dear to medical interpreters was leading the task of passing the Massachusetts Emergency Room Bill signed into law as Chapter 66 of the Acts of 2000. The law states that all hospitals which provide acute care in emergency rooms or in acute psychiatric services must use competent interpreter services when treating non-English speaking patients. The passing of Chapter 66 of the Acts of 2000 was the forward thrust to professionalize medical interpreters and ultimately allowing disadvantaged patients to have a voice and seek quality care.

MassAHEC Network established the award for medical interpreters in Tony Winsor's name in 2015. The purpose of this award is to honor a person who, like Tony Winsor, has advocated for professionalizing the work of a medical interpreter to improve language access for all persons. The contributions to the field of medical interpreting may include advocating for the utilization of medical interpreters, providing education for medical interpreters, or promoting the work of medical interpreters.



Massachusetts Medical Interpreter Training

Helping bridge communication barriers faced by patients accessing health care services.

Paving the Way to Health Care Access: Two Days of Learning for Interpreters

Tony Winsor Award Recipient for 2019: Vonessa Costa

Words from Nomination Committee:



This year, once again, the selection committee received nominations that were truly compelling. The selection of Vonessa Costa was based on her outstanding commitment and many progressive and ongoing contributions to the individual interpreters and programs that care for, engage and empower CHA's linguistically diverse community, to advocate for the ever-progressive movement of patient-

centered care, and to enhance partnerships with and advance language access as a key to the provision of high-quality healthcare that embraces the principles of respect, dignity and choice for everyone.

Vonessa serves as Manager and Linguistic and Cultural Educator of the Multicultural Affairs and Patient Services department at the Cambridge Health Alliance (CHA). Vonessa has worked diligently on the continuous challenges of providing optimum interpreter services to the LEP patients. Vonessa understands the values of investing in staff that delivers the services and therefore, devotes times for their development. As a result, CHA has a nationally recognized robust multilingual interpreter services program, which currently employs nearly 100 exceptional interpreters working in 23 languages and serves upwards of 315,000 interpreter requests a year via face-to-face, video, and telephonic interpreting modalities.

Vonessa has taken to heart the encouragement from senior leadership for the Multilingual Program managers and staff to have individual interpreter offer a regular and meaningful participation in interdepartmental and organization-wide initiatives in projects aimed at building strong collaboration between providers and interpreters. Vonessa understands the value of investing in others so they will invest in themselves and by cultivating their special qualities; she helps her staff to participate in educational initiatives to improve LEP patients' experience of care. Their contributions are appreciated at the daily rounds, the OR Quality Improvement Workgroup, the Patient

Past Awardees

2018 – Joy Connell, DMH
Interpreter Services

2017 – Estela McDonough,
UMass Memorial

2016 – Jane Kontrimas, Beth
Israel Hospital



Experience of Care Steering Committee, the Diversity Council, medical grand rounds, co-presentation at New Providers Orientation and Med/Psych Resident/Intern training, Hand Hygiene and Wellness committee. Vonessa has ensured that medical interpreters have a resonant voice and an increased stake in the CHA community and they truly feel that they are interpreter ambassadors throughout the hospital, and by extension, the LEP patients also have a stronger voice.

The Director offered these words: “She is always looking for educational opportunities for the interpreters at CHA. As recently as last fall, she has conducted a number of workshops to help our interpreters prepare for national certification and has brought in outside presenters to assist with this goal. As a result of her hard work and dedication, about 25 of our interpreters now hold national certification with several others working toward this goal. Vonessa herself felt a responsibility to set the standard for her interpreters by taking the certification exams and holds national certification in two certification bodies.

She is an excellent presenter on several topics aiming at raising awareness about the interpreter profession, diversity and inclusion, cultural competency, health disparities and effective language access.” In addition, Vonessa sits on the “FOCIS” board and is always ready to share ideas and best practice to colleagues and counterparts for the advancement of the interpreter profession in general. A FOCIS colleague offered these words: “Vonessa in my opinion is one of the smartest, passionate and committed leaders in the interpreter world and works tirelessly to improve care for all LEP patients. She is always available to help other managers and share many of the resources she has helped to create. Vonessa has contributed to numerous research projects as well as publications .”

Nominees for 2019

- **Avlot Quessa**, Senior Director, Multicultural Affairs & Patient Services, Cambridge Health Alliance, Cambridge MA
- **Eric Hardt**, Medical Attending Physician, BMC (Retired 2017), Retired Associate Professor of Boston University School of Medicine

With thanks to the Nomination Committee members:

- **Alexandra Avedisian**, Chief Marketing Officer, ID-QUEUE
- **Joy Connell**, Director, Office of Race, Equity and Inclusion, DMH
- **Carla Fogaren**, RN, QMI, System Director of Diversity Initiatives and Interpreter Services, Steward Health Care
- **Jane Kontrimas**, M.S., CoreCHI™, Russian Interpreter, Interpreter Ethics Liason and Interpreting Training Coordinator, Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center
- **Elena Langdon**, CT, M.A., CoreCHI, Coordinator & Lead Interpreter, MassAHEC Medical Interpreter Training - UMass Medical School