UMass Medical School announces recipient of first Ernest "Tony" Winsor medical interpreter award

A registered nurse known nationally as a pioneer in the field of medical interpreting has been chosen as the recipient of the first Ernest "Tony" Winsor Award, which will be presented June 19 at the 10th annual Paving the Way to Health Care Access conference co-sponsored by MassHealth and UMass Medical School.

Carla Fogaren, RN, system director of Diversity Initiatives, Interpreter Services and ADA coordinator at Steward Health Care, was nominated for the award by six colleagues.

"I am speechless, which, for those who know me, is indeed a very rare thing. I am humbled by this. I hope Tony is smiling down and pointing his finger at me saying something like … you have to work harder," Fogaren said after learning she had been chosen to receive the award.

"As our leader and role model, we can attest that Carla has been making an exceptional difference in advancing medical interpreting and language access since the early 1990s. She works tirelessly, with heartfelt compassion and total commitment and zeal in advocating for medical interpreters and the patients who depend on this profession to communicate with their healthcare providers," her colleagues wrote in their nomination.

Forgaren became involved in the medical interpreter field because she was the only Portuguese-speaking registered nurse working the second shift in a community hospital that had many Portuguese-speaking patients. Even though Forgaren speaks Portuguese, she didn't know the medical terminology in that language, so she sought out a medical interpreting program to help her learn. She found the Massachusetts Medical Interpreters Association, now known as the International Medical Interpreters Association, which recently had been formed by a small group of people who wanted to become experts in the field.

Forgaren worked for many years at Good Samaritan Medical Center. In 1993, Good Samaritan became one of the few hospitals in the United States to have a formal medical interpreting program and she was chosen to lead the department. She founded the Forum of the Coordination of Interpreter Services, a statewide health care management organization, in 2003. Forgaren was promoted to a position overseeing all of Steward Health Care hospitals' interpreter departments in 2010.

Lisa Morris, MSTD, director of Cross Cultural Initiatives at the Massachusetts Area Health Education Center (MassAHEC), a unit within UMass Medical School's Commonwealth Medicine division, notified Forgaren of the honor.

The award is named in honor of the lawyer who worked for the passage of the Massachusetts Emergency Room Interpreter Bill, which was signed into law in 2000. The law mandates that all hospitals that provide acute care in emergency rooms or acute psychiatric services use competent interpreter services when they treat non-English-speaking patients.

Winsor advocated for professionalizing the work of a medical interpreter to improve language access for all people, and Forgaren has "walked in his footsteps and forged forward by his side for a good long time to make a difference for interpreters as well as for non-English-speaking patients," Morris said.