

American Association of Community Dental Programs Lifetime Achievement Award: Myron Allukian, Jr.

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The theme of this conference, "Lights, Camera, a Call to Action," obviously has Hollywood overtones. So, at this awards ceremony, I am reminded of one of my very favorite movies, "The Wizard of Oz," and three of my all-time favorite characters, the Tin Man, the Cowardly Lion, and the Scarecrow. I am sure you all remember the famous scene in which, as the Wizard of Oz is preparing to return in his hot air balloon to Kansas—thus dashing the hopes of the Tin Man to get a heart, the Lion to find courage, and the Scarecrow a brain—the Wizard points out that, in fact, they never needed a Wizard to help them find their dreams. Indeed, the Tin Man, he explained, always had a heart—but what he didn't have was a testimonial. So the Wizard presented him with a clock, a "ticker." And the Lion, well, he had certainly demonstrated his courage—but what he did not have was a medal, which the Wizard bestowed upon him. As for the Scarecrow, he, of course was the brainiest of the bunch—but what he didn't have was a diploma, which the Wizard presented to him.

Like my three favorites, the American Association for Community Dental Programs (AACDP) also has been on a journey, following the yellow brick road, seeking help from the Wizard. Only in our case, it is recognition we seek as a legitimate organization to stand among others. As it turns out, lo and behold, we have been a legitimate organization all along. What we didn't have was an award or an awardee.

However, our Awards Committee, made up of a bunch of wizards, realized that what we did have was a city dental director who, because of his heart, his courage, and his brain has been an inspiration to us all toward improving the oral health and the lives of millions of Americans.

Dr. Myron Allukian, Jr., graduated from Tufts University with a BS in psychology in 1960 and the University of Pennsylvania School of Dentistry in



Drs. Larry Hill and Myron Allukian, Jr.

1964. While a Navy dentist, he demonstrated his heart serving with the US Marine Corps in Vietnam, where he initiated a people-to-people program by providing dental care to children in orphanages in the Danang area. This program was later expanded to include the refugee camps, schools, and villages.

He returned to Boston and received his formal dental public health training at Harvard University under the mentorship of Dr. James Dunning. It was while at Harvard that he established the first dental assistant training program for disadvantaged women—another demonstration of his heart. He began the dental program at the Bunker Hill Health Center, which became the model for 18 other health center dental programs, all of which he personally developed or nurtured as the dental director of the city of Boston's Health Department, where he has

worked since 1970. Today these programs provide more than 100,000 patient visits per year. He also began one of the first homeless dental programs in the country; started a unique dental program for persons with AIDS, which mainstreams their care in both the public and private sectors; led the fight to save the Adult Dental Medicaid Program in Massachusetts at least three or four times; and initiated the Massachusetts Legislative Commission on Oral Health, which resulted in over \$35 million in new funding for oral health. And while we see the dental part of Myron's heart, few know of his total dedication to his family, his six children (he must have been out sick on the days family planning was discussed at Harvard), and his parents. Myron speaks to his mother, who is 95 years old, several times a day and stays with her whenever he feels it's necessary.

Okay, what about his courage? Myron is one of the most persistent of our dental public health colleagues. While he remains the master delegator, a trait about which we sometimes joke, against great odds he led the long and eventually successful battle to fluoridate greater Boston's water supply and much of Massachusetts'. He was instrumental in acquiring federal funding for dental public health residencies and fluoridation and helped lead the effort for continued recognition of public health as a specialty of dentistry. He helped to sensitize the dental profession and decision makers about the needs of persons with HIV/AIDS and was instrumental in having oral health included in the 1990

Health Objectives for the Nation. And he co-chaired Senator Kennedy's Oral Health Advisory Committee during the health care reform discussions of the early and mid-1990s.

Finally, let's address his brain power and wisdom. Myron has an astute ability to recognize excellent talent (tongue in cheek). Not only did he hire me for my first job in the public sector, but over the years he has mentored the likes of Drs. Mark Siegal, Lynn Gilbert, David Rosenstein, Aljeron Bolden, Victor Badner, Greg Connolly, and Steve Uranga-McKane, among many others. Judy Stavitzky, a public health generalist and now senior program officer at the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation who oversees the

Pipeline Project, spent time working as an intern alongside Myron in Boston. Myron continues to serve informally as a senior policy advisor to us all.

Therefore, it is a great honor for me today, on behalf of the American Association for Community Dental Programs, to present its first Lifetime Achievement Award to Myron Allukian Jr., DDS, MPH, for establishing an exemplary city dental program in Boston, MA, and for his local, state, and national contributions to improve the oral health of America's communities. Hereafter the award shall be named the "Myron Allukian Jr. Award for Outstanding Achievements in Community Dental Programs."

Congratulations, Myron.

Remarks on Receiving the American Association of Community Dental Programs Lifetime Achievement Award

Myron Allukian, Jr., DDS, MPH

My dear friends and colleagues, I am very pleased and honored to receive the first Lifetime Achievement Award of the American Association of Community Dental Programs, hereafter called the Myron Allukian Jr. Award. What an honor! Thank you very much.

When I graduated from the University of Pennsylvania, School of Dental Medicine, I didn't know what dental public health was. I joined the Navy to see the world and ended up with the Marines. First, in Okinawa, then at the 3rd Marine Division Field Hospital outside of Danang, Vietnam, where all the killed and wounded Marines were brought as mass casualties, usually between 11 pm and 4 am. There were only three physicians and 14 dentists, so we did everything. In my free time, I was a volunteer dentist in the orphanages, refugee camps, schools, and villages in the area. At the Buddhist orphanage, the children would sing a thank-you song when we finished. This penetrated me from head to toe and if someone offered me a million dollars I would not have taken it.

After I returned to the United States,

I decided to work in developing countries and then spent the next three years at Harvard with Dr. James M. Dunning, my mentor. While a post-doctoral fellow at Harvard, I testified at a legislative hearing to repeal the state's mandatory fluoridation referendum law. In preparing my testimony, I discovered that Massachusetts teenagers had six times more tooth decay than Vietnamese teenagers—and Massachusetts was ranked 48th in the United States in fluoridation. The dental needs in Massachusetts were even greater than in Vietnam.

In 1970, I became the City of Boston dental director. If someone were to ask me then to predict the most far-reaching vision possible for my job description, I would not have been able to guess more than 20 percent of what I experienced. It has been a very exciting and enriching career. You are where the rubber hits the road. You learn to maximize limited resources and compete for the dollar with many vital and essential human services. It has been very exciting to take the problems that you live with locally, resolve them, and utilize that expertise to promote and critique national programs

and policies. You start out like an apprentice for Donald Trump and end up as a survivor forging new and meaningful initiatives for the "real world." You learn not to make excuses, but to make efforts. You set your goals, never give up, and through persistence, patience, and perseverance reach for your goals to serve the public's best interest.

I will be leaving my job at the city of Boston in July 2004, but I am not retiring. As I will have four children in college for at least the next two years and one child in high school, I consider myself midcareer. I plan to stay in Boston, do consulting and teaching, and look for new opportunities to make a difference.

None of the accomplishments during my career could have been done without organized community efforts on the local, state, and national level. I would like to thank Dr. Larry Hill, my family, all of you, and the American Association of Community Dental Programs for this recognition and honor. For the opportunity to know and work with you, my public health colleagues, here and around the world ... Thank you again.

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