

1997 Special Merit Award: Donald Marianos, DDS, MPH

Presented by Rhys Jones, DDS, MS, Immediate Past President

The American Association of Public Health Dentistry's Special Merit Award is presented each year to an individual for special meritorious service to public health dentistry. This year's award is presented to Dr. Donald Marianos.

Dr. Marianos just retired from the US Public Health Service after having served as director of the Division of Oral Health, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Atlanta, GA, since 1992.

Don is a graduate of Indiana University School of Dentistry and Loma Linda University School of Public Health. Prior to joining CDC in 1989, he served for 12 years in various clinical and administrative assignments with the Indian Health Service, primarily in Arizona. In the IHS he advanced from contract dentist to facility dental officer, to staff dental officer, to chief of dental services at the Indian Health Service Hospital. Don was acting director of the Surveillance, Investigations, and Research Branch of the Division of Oral Health prior to his appointment as division director in June 1992.

He is the recipient of the 1991 Public Service Commendation for his work on HIV in the work place, the Chief Dental Officer's Exemplary Service Award, and the PHS Outstanding Service Medal. Last year he received the Presidential Award from the American Dental Association, primarily for his national leadership on HIV and infection control in dentistry.

Now all of this prior information is from Don's curriculum vitae. For more insightful information on an award recipient, I prefer to speak personally with the recipient about career highlights, most important dental public health accomplishments, and more.



Donald Marianos.

Those of you who know Don will anticipate that this type of personal interview would be a waste of time because Don will not talk about himself. The personal interview was a waste of my time; fortunately, here in Washington, DC, at our 60th Annual Meeting, I have other sources of information—Don's colleagues, who are most eager to talk about him.

Two descriptive words most often emphasized were Don's courage and leadership:

—Don's front-line leadership on the Acer case in Florida—a possible HIV transmission from health care worker to patients. This was the first of its kind and it happened to involve a dentist health care worker. What followed was a tireless investigation led by Don, the primary dental investigator at CDC. The investigation was critical and pressure was intense from the press, the public, CDC, and the American Dental Association, and was carried out at a precarious point in our knowledge base of HIV transmission.

—The Maine case—another test of national and worldwide importance and a first of its kind prosecution by the US Justice Department under the American with Disabilities Act against a dentist for refusing to treat HIV patients. Don was the primary person testifying for the Justice Department.

—The fight for survival of the Division of Oral Health at CDC. His courage and leadership in charting the division through these extremely difficult times was outstanding. On a number of occasions the division was nearly eliminated. The division's existence today is a direct result of Don's leadership.

Other comments by colleagues at CDC include:

—“With Don's unassuming nature, one is not aware of the behind-the-scenes courage he has to fight for dental public health”;

—“The degree of preparation and tension in Don's investigations and testimonies was extreme”;

—“He has the uncanny ability to get the best out of people”;

—“He plays to people's strengths and overlooks their weaknesses”;

—“He minimizes his role and maximizes everyone else's role”;

—“He never fails to have time for everyone.”

Except for me, Don, when I want to interview you for this presentation.

Don and his wife, Kathy, who is with him today, are in the process of moving back to Pinetop, Arizona, in retirement. In my short and unproductive interview with him I did hear the words skiing, biking, canoeing, and going back to his IHS roots—working as a contract IHS dentist.

Congratulations, Don, on receiving the AAPHD Special Merit Award.