



ILLINOIS ACADEMY OF
FAMILY PHYSICIANS

Devoted to Advocacy, Education & Action

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**Peoria Doctor is Illinois Academy of Family Physicians
2017 Family Physician of the Year
IAFP honors Rahmat O. Na'Allah, MD, FAAFP and others at
IAFP Annual Awards**

(ROSEMONT, Illinois – October 5, 2017) – The Illinois Academy of Family Physicians provided its highest honors: the Family Physician of the Year Award, Distinguished Service Award, Family Medicine Teacher of the Year and two President's Awards at their annual meeting October 5 in Rosemont.

2017 Family Physician of the Year – Rahmat O. Na'Allah

Rahmat O. Na'Allah, MD, FAAFP at a faculty physician at the University of Illinois College of Medicine at Peoria Family Medicine Residency Program. The soft-spoken Na'Allah has a big voice powered by tremendous admiration and respect from colleagues, patients and the community where she has served since 2009.

"We chose family medicine because we want to serve and take care of the underserved. We wanted to help. Not just treat diseases, but do something!"

"It is not easy for anyone to make as big of an impact as she has," says Peoria colleague and IAFP president-elect Asim K. Jaffer, MD. "It is even more impressive that she does it as a female minority immigrant Muslim in Central Illinois. She is truly a great role model and exemplifies the fact that Community Medicine is such an important part of what makes family physicians so integral in the health care of our country."

It was her husband, Abdul-Rasheed, a professor, who started their journey from Nigeria to America, which included a stop in Canada before he took a position at Western Illinois University in Macomb. But Macomb was too small for Rahmat! Though she already had her medical degree from Nigeria and an intern year at a hospital in Granada, she enrolled in the MPH program at University of Illinois at Springfield and the family moved (though Abdul-Rasheed continued to commute to Macomb).

After completing her residency training at Southern Illinois University at Springfield, she completed a high-risk obstetrics fellowship at West Suburban Hospital in Oak Park and she was ready to take the next steps in her dream career. And it had to be somewhere she could truly make a lasting improvement in the health of the community. Where she could use that high-risk obstetrics and the public health education and truly address the needs of a community to serve.

She sought an opportunity to use that training to bring full scope obstetrics to her practice and to train others. UICOM-Peoria gave her that opportunity to blaze the trail for the Peoria area. She was the first family physician to be credentialed to do C-sections in Peoria. Now she's the director of the OB fellowship program there, ensuring that the community has access to family physicians who can deliver babies in rural and underserved communities where an obstetrician could be miles or even counties away.

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Her passion is caring for teen girls and tackling the problems of teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted disease. There are certain zip codes in Peoria with tremendous discrepancies in teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted disease rates between black and white teen girls – and Na’Allah wants to change that. “We have a big responsibility here. We are lucky to be where we are, and not everyone has that same luck. These girls often have no role models or anyone to support them and tell them they are worthy and to respect their bodies, say no to drugs and sex. I can talk to them, tell them they need to respect themselves first.”

Peoria HealthCare Coalition member Katie Jones summarizes Na’Allah’s impact as a physician advocate. “What does a family seek in a family practice physician? This mother of four seeks to partner with healthcare providers who are abreast of local, state, national and international population health initiatives, standing up for the rights of all of my neighbors and friends, regardless of zip code, race or religion. Dr. Na’Allah makes us all proud and inspired to seek a better healthcare system for community, our state and our nation.”

Patient Tehseen Syed concurs, “Dr. Na’Allah is very well known in our small community and very much loved and respected. A role model for minority women trying to balance family life with individual social responsibility, philanthropy and a professional career.”

2017 Family Medicine Teacher of the Year – Cynthia M. Waickus, MD, PhD – Rush Medical College

There’s no place like Rush for the 2017 IAFP Family Medicine Teacher of the Year, Cynthia Waickus, MD, PhD. She’s been at the same institution since enrolling as a medical student in 1984. Since works at the same place she attended medical school and returned after completing her family medicine residency training at the affiliated residency program, located at Christ Hospital back in 1991.

Now Dr. Waickus leads the Family Medicine Leadership Program at Rush Medical College. Each year, up to five Rush students are selected for the four-year longitudinal program, where students develop their own patient panels through weekly outpatient clinic visits with a family medicine physician in the community all four years of school. They also develop and implement community and research projects, and engage in didactic sessions about leadership in family medicine.

Waickus is also vital to “closing the deal” with students considering family medicine. “She is supportive of students interests and helps facilitate connections with other family medicine physicians who share similar passions, and she is able to help students envision how they can pursue their passions through a calling as a family medicine physician,” says Emma Richardson, the Rush student who nominated Waickus for the award.

Steven K. Rothschild, MD a longtime colleague at Rush, estimates that Waickus has impacted the education of nearly 3,000 physicians through her direct work with medical students. He is especially enthusiastic about the Family Medicine Leadership Program, which graduated its first class in May 2017. In the first four years of existence, the FMLP boasts three Pisacano scholars, two Albert Schweitzer Fellows and the two current IAFP student leaders, president Sean McClellan and president-elect Emma Richardson.

“The Family Medicine Leadership Program has created a strong network of support and resources for students with a passion for family medicine. Her leadership of this program has helped create a culture and community that emphasizes the value of family medicine and supports students’ pursuits as emerging leaders in family medicine,” says Rothschild.

FMLP student Kristin Hillgamyer also submitted strong support for Dr. Waickus on behalf of current program participants. “Dr. Waickus is the mentor and advocate every medical student hopes to have. From the very beginning, she takes the time to understand our personal goals and foster our love for family medicine.”

2017 Distinguished Service Award – Ellen S. Brull, MD, FAAFP

Ellen S. Brull, MD has been a constant presence at IAFP since she moved to Illinois after completing residency training in Ohio. Through decades of involvement, she’s become a physician leader within the Advocate system, a trusted advocate with her own lawmakers and a valued friend and leader for IAFP members. She has served on the IAFP board, including president and board chair, and has been the Illinois alternate and delegate to the AAFP Congress of Delegates. She has served for over a decade on the IAFP Government Relations committee and a three-year term on the AAFP’s Commission on Government Advocacy.

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As the co-owner in a small practice in Niles, Brull has been able to champion the views and challenges of small practice physicians to lawmakers, while also working diligently to support and advance small practices within the Advocate Physician Partners system. Her practice partner, Deborah Geismar, MD has worked side-by-side with Brull for 25 years.

“Dr. Brull has been a leader in the administration of our office, spearheading the search and evaluation of electronic medical record systems,” said Geismar. “She also has served as the original champion for becoming a recognized Patient Centered Medical Home in 2014.”

She also serves as a PHO Medical Director for Lutheran General Hospital at Advocate and continues to advocate on behalf of Family Physicians during her role on the Advocate Physician Partners Utilization Management committee.

IAFP past board chair, Alivia Siddiqi, MD cites Brull’s leadership impacting her back when she was a resident. “She helped lead the FMCC (AAFP Family Medicine Congressional Conference) delegation when I was a resident scholarship recipient to the conference about 10 years ago. I still recall her asking then-Senator Barack Obama if he recognizes the value of primary care and what he plans to do to help primary care and Family Medicine physicians.”

Brull is a consistent and valued voice at the Academy’s state and federal advocacy events. She is a regular participant in state and federal advocacy events, where she is a welcomed guest in the offices of her state and federal lawmakers. Brull also carefully cultivates these relationships back home in the district. Her commitment to advocacy through her time, expertise and contributions make her a trusted voice for family medicine. U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky says, “She is an invaluable resource to me and the Illinois Congressional Delegation on so many issues, from resident training to health information technology to payment reform. True to the values of family medicine, she has always promoted quality care for patients as the top priority in any policy or legislative discussion.”

Brull’s continuous advocacy work led to her appointment to the AAFP FamMedPAC board of directors. This allows her to continue to voice the importance of the political action committee and help to decide where the PAC’s contributions are directed. Many Illinois members of Congress who support family medicine issues have received support from the PAC.

Her unique position has also been valuable in fielding media requests and doing interviews on topics across the board, from patient care, to policy to electronic health records and practice management. Within IAFP, she currently works with the new Women in Leadership interest group to share her experiences with women members.