

KANSAS CITY  
**MEDICAL SOCIETY**

DECEMBER 2022





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*As my second year as President of the Kansas City Medical Society wraps up, I am pleased with the achievements made regarding the future of KCMS. We held two in-person annual meetings and celebrated physicians in the Kansas City metro area, hosted a book club for physician leadership training, exerted our physician voice on masking in schools during the peak of the pandemic, the opioid crisis and recreational marijuana clinical concerns. The work we have done with our Foundation included physician education, community health programs and over \$8 million in donated health care for the uninsured.*

*While we have many amazing and active physicians in the community on our Board of Directors and Leadership Council, we need more! This Society is over 140 years old and the mission is to improve the health of all in greater Kansas City through leadership, advocacy and innovation. It takes all of us to carry this mission forward for generations to come. We are excited to engage new physicians, physicians young in their careers as well as retired physicians to elevate involvement in the Society and continue the tradition of serving greater Kansas City.*

*Please consider reaching out to your peers, administrators, vendors, health systems and other contacts to encourage their engagement of time and treasure to promote the ongoing mission of the Kansas City Medical Society.*

*Best to All,  
Scott W. Kujath, MD, FSVS, FACS.  
President, Kansas City Medical Society*

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Karole Bradford, Foundation Chief Executive Officer

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# *A Night to Reignite Your* **PASSION FOR MEDICINE**

KANSAS CITY MEDICAL SOCIETY ANNUAL MEETING

More than 100 physicians and guests gathered for the KCMS Annual Meeting on Oct. 25 at the Amigone Urban Winery in Kansas City. The theme of the evening was “Reignite Your Passion for Medicine.” In his remarks, KCMS President Scott Kujath, MD, FSVS, FACS, commented on Society challenges and accomplishments over the last year.

A highlight of the evening was the annual KCMS Awards presentation, including a Lifetime Achievement Award to neurologist Larry Hollenbeck, MD, FAAN. (See profiles of all six honorees starting on page 6.)

## **PHYSICIAN WELL-BEING SURVEY**

In keeping with the meeting’s theme, Anjalee Carlson, DO presented results of a physician well-being survey conducted by KCMS and the Foundation. Area hospitals were asked to respond to questions about their physician well-being initiatives.

60% of responding organizations said they have physician well-being strategies and goals in place. 80% of responding organizations have a physician well-being committee. Only one of the responding organizations with a physician well-being committee offers its chairperson protected time and a budget for its scope of work.

Future goals include creating a conversation to start energizing our physicians to work towards improving physician wellness at hospitals they are affiliated with. Plans include exploring physician wellness opportunities in the greater Kansas City area. Members are urged to encourage their organizations to respond to the survey so further data can be collected.

Meeting guests enjoyed the special ambiance at Amigone Urban Winery







KCMS President Scott Kujath, MD and Lifetime Achievement Award honoree Larry Hollenbeck, MD



Dr. and Mrs. Keith Jantz, KCMS Foundation-Retired Physicians Organization



Scott Kujath, MD and Community Advocate Award honoree Blair Thedinger, MD



Dr. Stefanie Ellison, KCMS Leadership Council (left), Dr. Carole Freiburger-O'Keefe, KCMS President Elect (right) and husband Dr. Pat O'Keefe (center)



Scott Kujath, MD and Rising Star Award honoree Kelsey Able, DO



Scott Kujath, MD and Exemplary Leadership Award honoree Dhanunjaya Lakkireddy, MD



Dr. Austin Wagner (left), and Dr. Blair Thedinger

# **AWARD RECIPIENTS**

*~ 2022 ~*

Recognizes a KCMS member physician for leadership, lifelong commitment to health and dedication to the health of the greater Kansas City community.

## LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

*Larry Hollenbeck, MD, FAAN*



Growing up in rural Eureka, Kansas, Larry Hollenbeck, MD, was inspired by his father, a family practice doctor who occasionally took Larry along on house calls and weekend hospital rounds. "This instilled in me an interest in medicine and helping care for others in need."

As an undergraduate at the University of Kansas, he worked under Dr. Nancy Dahl in the neurophysiology research lab. "I was fascinated by the complexity of the nervous system and found I had an aptitude for neurology."

Neurologist Fred Sachen, MD, further inspired his interest in neurology. "I've always been impressed by his thoroughness, wisdom and thoughtful evaluation of patients with neurological disorders."

Later they went into practice together in Kansas City's northland area.

He points to his stint as Medical Staff President at North Kansas City Hospital as one of his most significant achievements. It was "during a time in the growth of the hospital with expansion in a variety of outreach services that benefited the entire Northland community, and I feel privileged to have played a part in that."

Dr. Hollenbeck continues to serve in numerous other leadership positions at NKCH, including the credentials committee.

As a practicing neurologist, he finds it gratifying to help patients deal with a complicated or life changing diagnosis and support them as they journey through the path of their disease.

Starting his medical practice from scratch and building it to its current state is another proud achievement. "I started with no office of my own, and no guarantee of referrals or income. I'm grateful for members of the medical community who encouraged and supported me as I started out, such as Dr. Newt McCluggage and Dr. Revis Lewis."

He chose the city's northland area to establish his practice because it was underserved in neurological care with great potential for growth. He co-founded Northland Neurological Consultants (now Meritas Health Neurology), which gradually became one of the metropolitan area's largest neurology practices.

He feels fortunate to mentor young neurologists at the start of their careers and watch them use what they've learned as a springboard to advance neurology care across the region. "It's very fulfilling to have a career that is continually changing and challenging us to stay current with new and promising treatments."

Dr. Hollenbeck has shared his expertise on medical advisory boards for the local Parkinson's Foundation and Myasthenia Gravis Association and served as a panelist at conferences for both organizations. He

*"Dr. Hollenbeck is known for his excellence in caring for neurological patients, but he stands as one of our community's kindest, most compassionate physicians and capable, trusted leaders. His wise council continues to be sought, especially during the most challenging times."*

~Colleague Sarah Hon, DO

is currently a physician evaluator for the National Football League's Concussion Settlement Program (Medical Award Fund track).

Colleague Sarah Hon, DO, said "Dr. Hollenbeck is known for his excellence in caring for neurological patients, but he stands as one of our community's kindest, most compassionate physicians and capable, trusted leaders. His wise council continues to be sought, especially during the most challenging times.

"The treatment of neurological disorders has shown tremendous advances during my 40 years in medicine," said Dr. Hollenbeck. "It has been an incredibly rewarding career."

Recognizes a KCMS member physician who has demonstrated exemplary leadership in advancing their profession, patient care, KCMS and the health of the community.

## EXEMPLARY LEADERSHIP AWARD

*Dhanunjaya Lakkireddy, MD*



The question of whether great leaders are born or made has been debated for generations. In Dhanunjaya Lakkireddy's case, leadership has always come naturally.

"I've always been one to challenge the status quo, even as a kid," said Dr. Lakkireddy. "Why be satisfied with the way things are when they can be improved? That's the driving force behind anything in life."

Dr. Lakkireddy is a board-certified, fellowship-trained cardiologist specializing in electrophysiology and the Medical Director for the Kansas City Heart Rhythm Institute at HCA Midwest Health.

An acclaimed practitioner and researcher for 20 years, Dr. Lakkireddy has published more than 550 papers and 1100 abstracts on his cutting-edge research in the field of electrophysiology and is a sought-after keynote speaker for international conferences. Additionally, he founded, hosts and is the course director for the Kansas City Heart Rhythm Symposium, which provides medical education to providers in Greater Midwest.

He founded his career on three pillars – sound clinical medicine, cutting-edge ac-

ademic research, and advanced education. "I firmly believe that being academic is a state of mind, not an endowed honor from an ivory tower academic institution. You can be who you want to be if you remain open-minded, challenge the status quo and ask lots of questions."

Among his many achievements, he is proud of the fact "that I've made a small contribution to impact the practice of electrophysiology," filling in gaps in knowledge that helped advance patient care.

A gifted educator, he drew inspiration from a "wise professor who said that a duty as a doctor doesn't end with the patient in front of you; it extends to your peers and the whole house of medicine." True to his leadership instincts, he identified a need for electrophysiology fellows to polish their clinical decision-making skills before going into practice and helped establish the EP Finishing School.

Dr. Lakkireddy credits colleagues Dr. James Vacek and Dr. Betty Drees as inspirations along the way. "Jim was my mentor in cardiology. I wrote my first cardiology paper with him. And, Betty Drees (former KCMS President) was my docent as a resident. Her gentle, positive approach to patient care really impressed me."

Currently Professor of Medicine at University of Missouri, Columbia and University of Nevada Las Vegas, Dr. Lakkireddy is the recipient of numerous professional honors and awards. Many accolades have centered on his extensive clinical research activity. He continues to serve as the principal investigator for clin-

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ical trials and studies around the world, serves as associate editor for the Journal of Atrial Fibrillation & Electrophysiology and is an editorial board member and reviewer for more than 30 prestigious scientific publications. He serves as on the board of Heart Rhythm Society & Chairman of the American College of Cardiology Section Steering Committee.



Recognizes a KCMS member physician who has made significant contributions to helping patients with access to care or improved quality of care.

## PATIENT AND COMMUNITY ADVOCATE AWARD

*Molly Uhlenhake, DO, FACP*



Activism is baked into Molly Uhlenhake, DO's DNA.

As a child she participated in hunger hikes, peace protests and missions to deliver food and clothing to houseless families with her role-model mother. Her father encouraged her to stand up for equality and justice. In high school she peer-navigated a blind student who later became a friend. In college she transformed an inner-city park using an award grant she had earned.

"Working with underserved populations is the core of who I am," said Dr. Uhlenhake, who chose primary care because that's where she felt she could make the most impact. It wasn't until she worked at a youth homeless shelter in Colorado that she discovered her medical education in LGBT+ health care was lacking. While 40% of homeless youth are LGBT+, she often misgendered them. "They were my first teachers. They made me realize the gaps in my education and training."

When she returned to Kansas City, she worked in the Gender Pathway Services clinic at Children's Mercy and then eventually worked with a team to design and

implement a LGBT+ Specialty Clinic at University Health.

"The work I do in this clinic is the most fulfilling and inspiring work I do as a physician."

Additionally, Dr. Uhlenhake is Medical Director of Vaccines for Children, Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention and Immigrant/Refugee Health at the Kansas City, Missouri Health Department. She was appointed to Kansas City's first Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay, Trans and Queer (LGBTQ) Commission, helping to broaden the perspectives in those serving in local government. In 2021 she received the Inspire Award for vision, integrity, collaboration and service from the American Medical Women's Association.

Her advice to colleagues who'd like to get involved, but don't know where to start? "Advocacy can be learned. Start small," said Dr. Uhlenhake. "Projects and commitments don't have to be huge. Involve your family. Take your friends. Invite your colleagues. Community activism and volunteering are energizing. Do it throughout the year, not just on holidays or give-back opportunities. Look for smaller organizations, the ones led by marginalized populations that are under supported. Your outlook on life will expand. Just do something.

"As doctors, we are privileged," she adds. "I believe it is our duty to provide top notch care to anyone who walks through the door. It's crucial that we educate ourselves on other cultures, identities, and communities. We must stand up and

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Recognizes a KCMS member physician, practice or facility that has made a significant contribution to the community.

## COMMUNITY SERVICE AWARD

*Blair Thedinger, MD, AAHIVS*



As Associate Medical Director at KC CARE Health Center, Blair Thedinger, MD, personifies the clinic's mission to serve everyone in the community through quality, affordable health services – with dignity and personalized care. A family practitioner, he is instrumental in leading KC CARE's nationally known HIV testing, outreach, and treatment program, a special interest since his residency days in California.

In addition to work on HIV/AIDS, he has developed a hepatitis C treatment program at KC CARE. Dr. Thedinger noted that during his medical training he “regularly saw patients suffering with cirrhosis and chronic Hepatitis C. Treatment options at the time were pathetic.” As new therapies became available, it seemed like a miracle. Hepatitis C treatment became easy and effective. He also was compelled by the advances in HIV medicine. “It could be argued that the development of highly active anti-retroviral agents in the 1990s was one of the greatest medical breakthroughs of all time. Millions of lives have been saved. I wanted to be part of that.”

When insurance and pharmaceutical

companies blocked access to Hepatitis treatment therapies, he pushed back. Dr. Thedinger was instrumental in helping the American Civil Liberties Union overturn a Medicaid rule that required patients with Hepatitis C to be sober from alcohol and illicit drugs for three months prior to treatment initiation.

Through active outreach, he's helped to ensure that people in the area have wide access to testing and treatment for Hepatitis C. Today KC CARE's hepatitis C treatment program has longstanding partnerships with substance abuse recovery centers, making “entry ‘low barrier’ for Hepatitis C people in recovery,” said Dr. Thedinger.

Colleagues benefit from his expertise through his clinical leadership at the Midwest Aids Training and Education Center – Missouri. As an educator he offers HIV/AIDS training and support, enhancing the capacity of health care professionals to end the HIV epidemic in the Midwest. He is described as a generous, selfless, kind and professional mentor.

“I am honored to be recognized by the medical community for the work I have been involved in,” said Dr. Thedinger.

“Thanks also to the Kansas City Medical Society and the individual doctors for the work they do to make specialty care available to patients at KC CARE.”

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Recognizes a non-physician for outstanding service to medicine.

## FRIEND OF MEDICINE AWARD

*David Rush* BS, PHARM.D, BCPS



Though Dr. David Rush Emeritus Professor of Medicine and Clinical Pharmacology at the UMKC School of Medicine, retired eight years ago, former students and colleagues routinely reach out to him for advice and counsel today.

Those valued partnerships are the hallmark of Dr. Rush's highly collaborative career.

Early in his education he discovered pharmacology was not a required course in medical training, only an elective. It was rare for pharmacists and physicians to consult with each other on patient care. Dr. Rush is proud to have been part of the 1970's movement toward teaching clinical pharmacology at the patient bedside. "Eventually pharmacologist involvement in direct patient care became accepted, then expected. It is standard in many care settings now."

An Ohio Northern pharmacy graduate in 1969, and a doctoral graduate and resident from the University of Kentucky in 1975 he was attracted to the University of Missouri-Kansas City School of Medicine faculty because of its then unique team approach to medical education.

While teaching was never a career goal "it just evolved for me to be successful and needing to share knowledge with medical students, residents and practitioners and faculty. Clinical pharmacists have a specialized body of knowledge that bridges the gap in patient treatment."

He established his practice at Truman Medical Center Lakewood and taught clinical pharmacology and applied therapeutics to internal medicine and family medicine residents there and to family medicine residents at the Goppert Family Medicine residency at Baptist Medical Center. In all, he trained more than 800 medical residents and hundreds of medical and pharmacy students.

Along with Patrick "Rusty" Ryan in 1978 he established Doctor of Pharmacy Consultants, Inc. a successful independent consulting company. He published extensively in peer-reviewed medical and pharmacology journals, authored textbooks and co-founded the Clinical Experience Network of family physicians to conduct large national Phase IV clinical studies. He was awarded the national Clinical Practitioner Award of the American College of Clinical Pharmacy.

Career highlights include being the medico-legal discovery expert in defending physician colleagues, in the legal case against Procter and Gamble in the first tampon toxic shock death case ever filed and the first landmark case allowing the suing of the Veteran's Administration for an egregious drug-induced death.

Said Dr. Rush, "This award is valued

*"This award is valued by me as it validates my professional work over the decades. My involvement with students, residents, faculty and skilled practitioners has been an award unto itself."*

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Recognizes a KCMS member physician who has made significant contributions to medicine, their practice or the Medical Society early in their career.

## RISING STAR AWARD

*Kelsey Able, DO*



The daughter of a general surgeon and an OR nurse, gastroenterologist Kelsey Able, DO, was destined for a career in medicine. In the third year of medical school at the Kansas City University of Medicine and Biosciences she discovered endoscopy and was immediately hooked. “I looked forward to spending time in the endoscopy lab.

“It was especially fun when a patient had an indication for endoscopy and I was able to observe and confirm a diagnosis in real time,” she said. She reveled in the careful consideration of a differential diagnosis in her patients and challenge of finding the right management for them.

It’s clear that people matter to Dr. Able as much as the technical side of medicine. “The relationships I am building with long-term patients is lovely. I also relish the challenge of being a proceduralist. I love to learn new techniques and challenge myself. We often work alongside our primary care colleagues as well as general and colorectal surgery and oncology. It is always a team approach for our patients to achieve the best outcome.”

Currently Chair of the Medical Ethics

Advisory Committee at North Kansas City Hospital, her passion for the field was put to the test during the COVID-19 pandemic, when so many patients and providers were faced with making difficult health care decisions. “The committee took on a tremendous burden of increased consults as well as creating a triage system with emergency call to support our burgeoning load of sick patients and limited resources.”

It’s a demanding and rewarding effort. “The consults are always challenging and completing them is an artform. I’m very grateful for the support we have from the Center for Practical Bioethics here in Kansas City.”

Colleagues look up to her because she leads by example. “I want my kids to see that I care about my community and give back both in my office and outside the hospital walls. I think paying it forward is a delight.”

She works to encourage more women to go into gastroenterology where the gender gap is wide. She is a frequent lecturer on topics of community interest such as irritable bowel syndrome and food choices. Thomas Shireman, MD, her partner at Consultants in Gastroenterology, has been an influential mentor since she was a medical student. “He is a selfless leader and exhibits what a great GI doc does in practice.” John Bonino, MD, taught her as a resident that the “most important part of medicine was also being true to who you are as a person, and a parent.” Lessons she’s applied well as her star continues to rise. Regarding the award, “I am absolutely

*“I want my kids to see that I care about my community and give back both in my office and outside the hospital walls. I think paying it forward is a delight.”*

honored, and feel blessed to get to do what I love each day.”

# THANK YOU

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THE DEPARTMENT OF INTERNAL MEDICINE





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+  
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VOLUNTEER DOCTORS FROM KCMS

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A publication of the Kansas City Medical Society  
December 2022  
300 E. 39th Street, Kansas City, MO 64111  
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