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TAFP names recipients of top honors

THE WOODLANDS, TEXAS — The Texas Academy of Family Physicians named the recipients of its top honors during the organization's 2015 Annual Session and Primary Care Summit in The Woodlands, Texas, on Nov. 14. Each year, patients and physicians nominate extraordinary family physicians and others working on behalf of family medicine, and they are honored with a TAFP award.

TAFP is pleased to announce the 2015 TAFP award recipients.

Physician of the Year – Antonio Falcon, MD

Dr. Falcon returned to the Valley, where he grew up, after completing medical school in Houston and a residency in Waco. He has been practicing in Rio Grande City since 1980 and remains a staple of the community, helping to bring the first specialists to town in the mid-1980s because patients could not afford the drive to McAllen for appointments. Falcon also helped the community receive an additional nursing home, dialysis centers, and a permanent MRI. He co-chaired Governor Perry's Prop 12 campaign in 2003, recently served on the Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission, and was a presidential appointee to the United States-Mexico Border Health Commission. He is also a current member of the Texas Health and Human Services Council, mentors medical students through the Texas Statewide Family Medicine Preceptorship Program, and serves as a clinical assistant professor for UTMB.

Physician Emeritus – H. David Pope, Jr., MD

After graduating high school second in his class, getting his medical degree from Tulane, an Air Force internship, flight surgeon school, and a residency at a charity hospital, Dr. Pope fulfilled his calling and became a practicing family physician in 1961. Over the years he worked in solo practice, a multi-specialty clinic, a 100-bed Catholic hospital, Christian missions worldwide, as medical director for numerous nursing homes, and more. He was vital in the creation of the Texas A&M Family Medicine Residency program in Bryan, and TAFP's Brazos Valley Chapter. Pope still travels to the Texas-Mexico border multiple times a year for Christian missions, serves as Physician of the Day during the Texas Legislature every session, and is active in his church and community.

Patient Advocacy Award – Blair Cushing, DO

Dr. Cushing completed a public policy rotation with TAFP as a medical student during the 84th Texas Legislature, helping develop policy options for legislators to consider involving physician workforce.

Her efforts resulted in the passage of Senate Bill 18 by Sen. Jane Nelson, R-Flower Mound, which prioritized the creation of new primary care residency positions and funding for the Texas Statewide Primary Care Preceptorship Program. Cushing graduated from the University of North Texas Health Science Center and is a family medicine resident at Natividad Medical Center in Salinas, California.

Public Health Award – Brian Smith, MD, MPH

Dr. Smith served as the Regional Medical Director for the Texas Department of State Health Services Region 11 for 17 years, and for five additional years as the communicable disease clinician. In this role, he was responsible for 19 counties in South Texas, dealing with tuberculosis, diabetes, ebola, and other cross-border issues, and provided emergency preparedness for many hurricanes along the coast. Before joining DSHS, he practiced medicine in South Texas community health centers, with the Cherokees and Choctaws in Oklahoma, and in various countries including Guatemala and Nigeria.

Exemplary Volunteer Teaching Award – Adrian Billings, MD, PhD

Dr. Billings is a professor for both the UTMB and Texas Tech Permian Basin, and has been a preceptor in the Texas Statewide Family Medicine Preceptorship Program for many years, precepting about 100 medical students total. He recently became the program's director. He has also hosted about 20 residents in the Big Bend area, working alongside them to demonstrate true rural family medicine. He is known for incorporating the students and residents into every aspect of his practice. His community has seen three former trainees return to the area to practice.

Exemplary Teaching Award – Nora Gimpel, MD

Dr. Gimpel is an assistant professor of family and community medicine and chief of the Community Medicine Division in the Department of Family Medicine at UT Southwestern. She is the director of numerous training programs at UT Southwestern including a predoc training program and a postdoc training program in community medicine. Gimpel is also on the advisory board for the Texas Area Health Education Center East DFW Region.

Special Constituency Leadership Award – Christina Kelly, MD

Dr. Kelly has been active in AAFP since her time as a medical student and after moving to Texas in 2011, she immediately got involved with TAFP. After serving the National Conference of Special Constituencies as new physician co-convener, she was elected convener for the newly renamed National Conference of Constituency Leaders. While her time as a new physician is now over, her nominator is sure Kelly will remain a strong, female leader to both TAFP and AAFP.

TAFP Foundation Philanthropist of the Year – Nancy and Dr. Patrick Leung

Dr. Leung has practiced family medicine in Midland since 1980 where Nancy, a registered nurse, manages their office. They want to attract more medical students to the family medicine, ensuring that the next generation of doctors includes enough family physicians for the population. Earlier this year the Leungs made a generous donation to the TAFP Foundation to fully endow the Patrick Leung,

MD, Medical Student Scholarship. It was awarded this summer to a student who had just finished his first year of medical school and participated in a family medicine preceptorship.

TAFP Political Action Committee Award – Troy Fiesinger, MD

Dr. Fiesinger is a longtime advocate for family medicine, working hard to develop local relationships with his elected officials. Not only does he serve as a key contact, but he is also regarded as an expert in health policy. He is active with TAFP's Political Action Committee and currently serves on AAFP's Commission on Governmental Advocacy.

The Texas Academy of Family Physicians is the premier membership organization dedicated to uniting the family doctors of Texas through advocacy, education and member services, and empowering them to provide a medical home for patients of all ages. It has 33 local chapters and is a chapter of the American Academy of Family Physicians. Visit www.tafp.org for more information.

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