The Schwartz Center Honors Three Caregivers with The 2026 Schwartz Compassionate Caregiver Award

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Recipients will be recognized October 27 at the
31st Annual Kenneth B. Schwartz Compassionate Healthcare Dinner in Boston

BOSTON (October 26, 2026)—The Schwartz Center for Compassionate Healthcare has selected a NICU physician in California, a nurse who cares for people experiencing homelessness in Belfast, and a palliative care physician in Texas as the recipients of the Schwartz Compassionate Caregiver Award.

This year's recipients will be honored on October 27 at the 31st Annual Kenneth B. Schwartz Compassionate Healthcare Dinner in Boston, MA. The event brings together healthcare leaders, clinicians, and supporters to raise funds for programs that help healthcare workers provide compassionate care to patients and families. This year's keynote speaker is **Maureen Bisognano**, president emerita and senior fellow at the Institute for Healthcare Improvement.

"Compassion shows up in small, specific acts: a parent given a seat at the table, a wound dressed on a doorstep, a favorite song played for a dying patient," said **Michael Gustafson, MD, MBA**, CEO of the Schwartz Center. "We are honored to recognize three caregivers who make that kind of care the standard."

"As a nurse, I know how much a single compassionate encounter can mean to someone at their most vulnerable. These caregivers have made that kind of encounter the standard in their communities," said **Robyn Begley, DNP, RN, NEA-BC, FAAN**, chair of the Schwartz Center Board and former CEO of AONL and former senior vice president and chief nursing officer of the AHA. "This award recognizes people who show up for others with dignity and respect, again and again."

The 2026 recipients are:

- **Malathi Balasundaram, MD,** Neonatal Intensivist (El Camino Health), Clinical Professor (Stanford School of Medicine), Founder and Executive Director (Family-Centered Care Taskforce), Palo Alto, California
  As a neonatologist and clinical professor at the Stanford School of Medicine, Dr. Malathi Balasundaram supports NICU patients, families, and care teams through some of the most fragile moments in medicine. Since 2017, she has voluntarily led family-centered care efforts at El Camino Health, treating parents as essential partners rather than visitors. She helped create a peer support program for NICU families and developed a Family Partnership Council that has grown to 52 parent voices, including bereaved parents, and ten parent mentors. Her reach extends well beyond her own hospital: she founded the nonprofit Family-Centered Care Taskforce, which now has more than 3,800 members. "She helped me find hope when I lost it and nurtured my purpose once I found it," said a former NICU parent.

- **Gerard (Gerry) Duffy**, Community Nurse for the Homeless, Belfast Health and Social Care Trust, Belfast, Northern Ireland
  Gerry Duffy, the first international recipient of the Schwartz Compassionate Caregiver Award, brings care to men and women experiencing homelessness across Belfast. In nearly two decades with the team, he has traveled the region providing wound care, flu vaccines, and HIV and hepatitis C screening, and stays involved to organize treatment. He also advocates for his patients, working with general practitioners, housing providers, police, and the city council so the right support follows when someone is housed, and he trains other health professionals in trauma-informed care. The service he helped build began as a nurse-led doorstep service and is now a core-funded National Health Service team. "Without respect there is no relationship," he says. A partner in the city's homelessness community said, "Gerry's dedication and commitment to those who often feel forgotten is outstanding. He never gives up until the individual receives the support they need."

- **Tyler Jorgensen, MD**, Assistant Professor of Internal Medicine, Assistant Program Director, Hospice and Palliative Medicine Fellowship (Dell Medical School at the University of Texas at Austin), Austin, Texas
  Dr. Tyler Jorgensen, an assistant professor of internal medicine at Dell Medical School at the University of Texas at Austin, helps patients, families, and fellow clinicians find connection and meaning in some of healthcare's most vulnerable moments. He serves on the inpatient palliative medicine team at two Austin hospitals, including a safety-net hospital, and leads the school's palliative care and geriatrics curriculum. In 2022, he started ATX-VINyL, a program that brings record players and carefully chosen vinyl to patients, many of them near the end of life, and now offers 55 to 70 listening experiences a month with the help of fifteen volunteers. His work extends to the people who care for patients: he teaches writing workshops, serves as a peer supporter for colleagues in crisis, and helps run storytelling nights for physicians and residents. "Tyler reminds us that connection and meaning are not extras in healthcare," said a colleague. "They are central to what we do."

About the Schwartz Compassionate Caregiver Award
Since 1999, the Schwartz Center has honored healthcare professionals who display extraordinary compassion in caring for patients and families. The award recognizes professionals whose achievements have helped create healing healthcare environments for patients, families, colleagues, and communities. Award finalists are chosen by a national review committee. Read more about the award and this year's recipients at theschwartzcenter.org/award.

The Schwartz Center is grateful to **CRICO** for its generous support of the Schwartz Compassionate Caregiver Award. For close to 50 years, CRICO has provided industry-leading medical professional liability coverage, claims management, and patient safety resources to all of the Harvard medical institutions and their affiliates, and is a recognized leader in evidence-based risk management. Through a national data collaborative, Candello, a division of CRICO, provides clinical risk intelligence products and solutions and fosters an active online community of shared learning.

“CRICO has spent decades working to make care safer, and we see every day that compassion is part of that work. These recipients show what it looks like in practice,” said **Mark E. Reynolds**, CEO of CRICO. “Behind every good outcome is a caregiver who took time to understand the person in front of them. We are grateful for the chance to celebrate three who do that so well.”

About the Schwartz Center for Compassionate Healthcare

Founded in 1995, the Schwartz Center for Compassionate Healthcare partners with organizations to advance compassion for patients, care teams, and their healing relationships.

More than 700 organizations around the world run the Schwartz Rounds® program, which creates dedicated space for caregivers to discuss the emotional dimensions of their work—both the challenges and the joys. Research shows this program strengthens compassion and enhances patient care.

The Schwartz Center is grateful to its Corporate Champions of Compassion, whose year-round support makes this work possible: Covista, CRICO, Foley & Lardner LLP, Mass General Brigham, Massachusetts General Hospital, Mintz, and Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts.

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