

Caring for the Ages

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Meet the 2026 Excellence Award Recipients

By Ellen Mullally



One of the highlights of PALTmed's annual conference each year is the presentation of the Foundation for Post-Acute and Long-Term Care Medicine's four excellence awards: Medical Director of the Year, Clinician of the Year, the James Pattee Award for Excellence in Education, and the William Dodd Founder's Award for Distinguished Service. Read on to learn about this year's recipients.

Medical Director of the Year

This award recognizes individuals whose vision, passion, leadership, knowledge, and commitment elevate patient care to exceptional levels of quality, excellence, and innovation. The 2026 recipient is Iris Boettcher, MD, CMD.

A past president of PALTmed – Michigan (formerly known as MIMDA), Dr. Boettcher serves as a medical director at several facilities, including The Inn at Freedom Village in Holland, MI, and Corewell Health West (formerly Spectrum Health) Rehab and Nursing Centers. She is also a clinical associate professor in Michigan State University's Department of Medicine, College of Human Medicine.

One of the colleagues who supported her nomination noted, "Dr. Boettcher has been an invaluable mentor. She has made herself available through formal meetings and informal conversations to help cultivate my leadership skills, navigate ethical dilemmas, and generally support my work in the SAR and LTC settings. She has been a proponent of work-life balance for me and our division as a whole...She has been creative in implementing modifications to our call system to help relieve the burden on our advanced practice providers. She is constantly reminding the team how thankful she is for us and our work for our residents and patients."

Dr. Boettcher says, "I am humbled to receive this recognition from the Foundation for PALTC Medicine. I joined AMDA as a fellow in geriatric medicine in 1989 and have gained so much from this organization we

now call PALTmed. It is an incredible honor to be named Medical Director of the Year. It is, in my opinion, one of the highest awards to be given to a physician in long-term care medicine.”

Clinician of the Year

Elizabeth Galik, PhD, CRNP, is the 2026 Clinician of the Year. The newest of the four Excellence Awards, Clinician of the Year was created to recognize a practitioner in the PALTC setting who embodies excellence in patient/resident care, which Dr. Galik certainly does.

She is a nurse practitioner in long-term care and community-based settings through clinical practice with the Sheppard Pratt Health System. In addition, she is a professor at the University of Maryland School of Nursing, where she teaches in the Adult-Gerontology Primary Care Nurse Practitioner Program and conducts research to improve care practices for older adults with dementia and their caregivers in long-term care.

She was nominated by several current and former members of the PALTmed Board of Directors. They said, in part, “We are thrilled to write this letter of support for Dr. Galik. She exemplifies the high standards associated with [this award]. Her work has altered the philosophy of care for those with severe dementia from being custodial and propagating disability to a philosophy in which function is optimized, and the quality of life of older adults is maintained.”

Like her fellow award recipients, Dr. Galik is honored and humbled to be selected as Clinician of the Year. She notes, “My clinical practice with older adults living with dementia in post-acute and long-term care settings has always inspired and informed my scholarly and educational pursuits. Working with residents, families, and the interdisciplinary team has been the highlight of my career, and to be recognized for this work by a professional organization that values clinical practice is truly meaningful.”

James Pattee Award for Excellence in Education

Established to honor James Pattee, MD, CMD, the father of the PALTmed Certification and Core Curriculum Programs, this award recognizes significant contributions that enhance the organization’s educational structure and framework, advance education specific to PALTC practice, and promote leadership through educational endeavors within the LTC continuum. The 2026 recipient is Sing Palat, MD, CMD.

Dr. Palat is a medical director with Senior Community Care for Optum Health and an attending physician at LTC Rehab Consultants. She is active on several PALTmed committees and subcommittees, has been president of PALTmed – Colorado since 2021, and has co-chaired the state organization's annual conference for the last few years. In addition, the PALTmed Choosing Wisely 2025 recommendations were created under Dr. Palat’s leadership. She supports clinical education for practitioners in Colorado and nationally and is an associate adjunct professor for the University of Colorado Division of Geriatric Medicine.

Several of her colleagues supported her nomination, noting that, “Her leadership comes from a profound respect for the patients we serve and her ability to inspire and support her PALTC colleagues. She has demonstrated the unique combination of exceptional medical expertise with thoughtful humanitarianism

and defines the standard of PALTC educators. She is a role model and a beacon for our PALTmed community.”

Reflecting on her award, Dr. Palat notes, “Nelson Mandela said, ‘Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.’ I wish that the mentors and educators who have influenced my journey knew how much they mean to me.” She adds, “In my community, education ranges from gestures of ‘Let me know if I can help’ to brilliant publications and webinars shared nationally. I love that PALTmed members teach and inspire each other, our patients, and the community.” Although she never met Dr. Pattee, if she had the opportunity, she’d ask him what practices today’s clinicians and medical directors could adopt to make him proud.

William Dodd Founder’s Award for Distinguished Service

This award, named for PALTmed’s founder and first president, recognizes significant contributions to building the organization’s organizational strength, image, and mission by promoting the development of competent, compassionate, and committed medical practitioners. Thomas Lehner, MD, FAAFP, is the 2026 recipient.

With more than 34 years of experience in primary care and post-acute and long-term care medicine, Dr. Lehner is currently a medical director for Buckeye Health Plan and Gentiva Hospice. He has been a member of PALTmed/AMDA since 1996 and has served on the Board of Directors and the Governance and Finance Committees. He is a past president of OMDA – The Ohio Society for Post-Acute and Long-Term Care Medicine and is the co-CMO of the Ohio Department of Aging’s R3AP Program.

In his letter of support, one of Dr. Lehner’s colleagues said, “I’ve had the privilege of working with Tom on the Board and on committees. He truly represents the ideal PALTmed member. I believe now is the time to show that hard-working, dedicated members can and should be rewarded for the countless volunteer hours they have given to make our organization what it is. I can’t think of a better way than to present Dr. Tom Lehner with [this award].”

“I was without words when I learned that I was the recipient of the William Dodd Founder’s Award. I am deeply honored to be recognized by my colleagues at PALTMed and very grateful for this special award. I never imagined being chosen to receive this award from among so many dedicated and deserving colleagues,” Dr. Lehner says. “PALTmed has been my professional home for almost three decades. I appreciate the opportunity to have served and worked with so many professionals over the years who are dedicated to caring for the patient population that we serve, and who make a difference in their lives.”

The awards will be presented to these deserving recipients later this month at PALTmed’s PALTC26 Annual Conference in Anaheim, CA. Please visit the [Foundation for PALTC Medicine website](#) for more information about the awards and how to make a donation to one of their wonderful programs.

Nominations for the 2027 awards will open later this year.

Ellen Mullally is PALTmed’s communications and publications manager and the managing editor of Caring for the Ages.

<https://paltmed.org/news-media/meet-2026-excellence-award-recipients>