



# Florida Behavioral Health Association

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## **For Immediate Release**

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Contact: Mary Katherine Delegal

[marykatherine@floridabha.org](mailto:marykatherine@floridabha.org)

850-566-8065

## **The Florida Behavioral Health Association Announces its 2020 Awards of Excellence**

### **Winners**

The Florida Behavioral Health Association's (FBHA) annual Awards of Excellence honor the best in its behavioral health workforce with a series of prestigious achievement awards.

FBHA's behavioral health provider members deploys its expertise across a broad range of prevention, health care and social service settings, which may include prevention and education programs; community-based outpatient and inpatient treatment programs; primary care health delivery offices; hospitals; emergency rooms; criminal justice systems and school-based or higher education institutions.

FBHA annually recognizes individuals in the areas of Peer/Recovery Support Specialist of the Year, Supervisor/Administrator of the Year, Clinician of the Year (Youth), Clinician of the Year (Adults), Medical Professional of the Year Award. This year, six behavioral health professionals will also be honored as Behavioral Health Pandemic Heroes. The Pandemic Heroes recognition is a special 2020 category created to honor those individuals who have worked tirelessly to make sure mental health and substance use treatment and prevention services were available to those in need during the pandemic.

"Each and every day, these selfless individuals put the needs of their patients first," said Melanie Brown-Woofter, President and CEO of FBHA. "This year has been extremely tough for everyone – it's evident in the significant increase in numbers of Floridians reporting more anxiety, depression and uncertainty across the state. We are so thankful for these behavioral health heroes and their continued dedication to helping others."

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, FBHA will not be having an in-person awards ceremony and instead, virtually congratulated each winner via personal Zoom calls, as well as publicly announced the winners today.

"I have the privilege of working with extraordinary people who are committed to serving Florida's behavioral health community, all in the mission to keep Floridians well," said Brown-Woofter. "The honorees this year have gone above and beyond for their patients before and

during the pandemic. I do not have enough words to express how meaningful these medical professionals are, and I only hope our annual awards can help shine a spotlight on the tremendous work they do.”

The FBHA 2020 Awards of Excellence winners follow:

**Peer/Recovery Support Specialist of the Year Award**

Lori Thomas, Certified Recovery Peer Specialist, Directions for Living:

Lori is a Certified Recovery Peer Specialist and has a truly amazing ability to use the lessons she has learned from her extremely traumatic life experiences to help others who are in deep despair. She makes every individual she encounters feel special, feel heard and feel loved. Lori informs her supervisor if she feels a client is at increased risk and also provides excellent communications with her peers. Lori goes above and beyond for her clients and makes them her top priority. She has served Adult Outpatient clients with severe and persistent mental illness for the last 16 years at Directions for Living. She treats approximately 225 clients each year through in-home, outpatient and telehealth services. Lori is professional, calming and humorous.

**Supervisor/Administrator of The Year Award**

Niurka Rolo, Administrator for Children's Community Teams and Prevention Services, Citrus Health Network, Inc.

Niurka Rolo has been at Citrus Health Network for nearly 23 years. As the Children’s Community Teams Administrator, she is instrumental and crucial in developing and expanding these services for more than a decade. In addition to the Children’s Community Teams, Niurka has overseen the Outpatient Psychotherapy Department, specialty programs for youth involved in Juvenile Justice and specialty services for new mothers with postpartum depression. Niurka brings guidance, compassion and positivity.

**Clinician of The Year Award (Youth)**

Amy Wilson, CATT Program Coordinator, Clay Behavioral Health Center:

Amy Wilson is someone who goes above and beyond for clients and is great with helping clients achieve their goals. Amy individualizes treatment for the patient and staffs each client closely and regularly to ensure she is providing the best care possible. Amy will pay for items out-of-pocket for clients when she thinks something is necessary for treatment but might not be covered by a grant. Amy juggles her roles well and keeps a balance between her client caseload and her program coordinator role. Clients, community partners and parents of patients love her.

**Clinician of The Year Award (Adults)**

Meredith Moran, Licensed Therapist, Operation PAR:

Meredith Moran has worked at Operation PAR since October 2008. She has worked in several positions and currently performs substance abuse and mental health counseling treatment, where she serves over 90 clients per year. Since 2016, Meredith has worked on PAR’s Outpatient program where she develops and edits new counselor training manuals, trains new counselors, develops check lists and creates innovative ways on how to work smarter. Meredith is the type of

employee who can always be counted on to assist, guide and provide outstanding services to clients. She is the first to help mentor, model and teach new interns, offer tips and best practices to new employees and is the first to collaborate on new ways of treatment. Meredith is Operation PAR's Wonder Woman.

### **Medical Professional of the Year Award**

Edwin Gomez, Acute Care Psychiatrist, David Lawrence Centers for Behavioral Health

Dr. Edwin Gomez has been practicing psychiatry for more than 20 years in South Florida. The past five have been as the primary bilingual adult psychiatrist for the David Lawrence Centers for Behavioral Health Crisis Stabilization Unit, where he delivers exceptional, compassionate and individualized care to clients suffering from mental illness. In addition to the care he provides, Dr. Gomez takes extraordinary measures to engage the families of clients and incorporate them into care, treatment and discharge plans. He also provides psychoeducation both for families and the caregivers of clients before their discharge. He is the primary provider who conducts examinations for those who are committed under the Florida Baker Act at the Collier County Jail. In doing so, he exhibits a unique set of diverse skills in collaboration with community partners showing respect for law enforcement in the jail settings and dignified care to persons who are suffering from mental illness and confinement.

### **Behavioral Health Pandemic Hero Awards**

The following six individuals have provided extraordinary service during the pandemic, whether it's counseling, peer support, tele-behavioral health, IT support, medical care, custodial care or any other service that reached beyond the boundaries of traditional care or position responsibilities:

- Colleen Colandrea; Colleen Colandrea, RN, SMA Healthcare
  - In the midst of COVID-19, Colleen Colandrea embraced the challenge of overseeing SMA's Deland Men's Residential Treatment (DMRT) facility's nursing department as the facility's only medical staff member. Colandrea continues to prioritize the needs of others above her own.
- Angela Dunbar, Administrative and Clinical Risk Manager, Centerstone
  - When the pandemic struck, Angela Dunbar stepped up and served as Centerstone's main point person for the community and in-house expert on protocols, procedures and communications. Dunbar personally toured units daily and provided hands-on training and education to staff. Furthermore, she is responsible for ordering and distributing all of the PPE and over 100,000 masks to over 700 staff members.
- Brandi Gardner, Human Resources Manager, Clay Behavioral Health Center
  - With grace and determination, Brandi Gardner served as a source of positivity throughout the pandemic. As human resources manager, Gardner assisted with the shift to models utilizing telehealth, PPE and social distancing protocols. She continues to put in extra hours and prioritize everyone else above herself.
- Damia Kelly, Director of Community Treatment, Directions for Living

- When others may have stepped down, Damia Kelly stepped up. Kelly immediately jumped into action when the pandemic began, working tirelessly to transport clients to treatment when others feared exposure. Since April 3, Kelly has been in the field, on the streets, going into encampments with homeless individuals to provide food, water, masks and hand sanitizers.
- Dr. Moraima Trujillo, Chief Medical Officer, Banyan Health Systems
  - At a time where other behavioral health facilities shuttered operations because of COVID-19, Dr. Moraima Trujillo kept her facilities open to continue to operate while overseeing a team of almost 200 employees. Dr. Trujillo reimagined Banyan Health Systems' existing emergency operations manuals, policies and led the Executive Leadership team in nightly task force meetings to make company-wide improvements to response to COVID-19.
- Ashley Valvano, Detox-Crossroads Nursing Supervisor and Infection Control Officer, David Lawrence Centers for Behavioral Health
  - As a full-time nursing supervisor, Ashley Valvano took on the role of working in David Lawrence Centers' detox unit. Valvano continually reviewed all the best practice guidelines to ensure they safety of clients, staff and visitors.

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*The Florida Behavioral Health Association is a non-profit organization that provides statewide leadership on behavioral health policy and practice. FBHA supports member agencies offering services to those in need of mental health and substance use disorder assistance and support. The Association's members include a broad range of provider types, ranging from small specialty organizations to comprehensive treatment organizations with multiple locations within a geographic region. FBHA is the result of a merger between the Florida Council for Community Mental Health and the Florida Alcohol and Drug Abuse Association. For more information please visit [www.floridabha.org](http://www.floridabha.org).*