



WHITTIER STREET HEALTH CENTER PRESENTS MELISSA LEASTON WITH 2020 PRESIDENT'S AWARD

*Honor for Jamaica Plain native who leads by example
and who overcame long odds to become nurse*

Melissa Leaston, who knew at an early age she wanted to become a nurse but had to overcome difficult circumstances to do so, has won the 2020 Whittier Street Health Center President's Award. The honor, the result of a peer nomination process and organization-wide vote, was presented to Leaston at the Health Center's fiscal year-end meeting on July 2.

Leaston joined the Whittier Street Health Center (WSHC) as a staff nurse 14-years ago, in that time rising through the ranks to become the Center's Director of Nursing and Infection Control Officer.

"It is an absolute honor to win the President's Award because my work at the Whittier Street Health Center means everything to me," said Leaston, a Jamaica Plain native. "Every year, I have the opportunity to make an even greater impact in my community than the year before. What started out as a passion has become my way of life."

Leaston has wanted to become a nurse since the age of ten, a vocation spurred by her appetite for books and science. A single mother, she worked two jobs while putting herself through nursing school, graduating on the Dean's List and with High Honors. After she passed her board exam, Leaston began working at WSHC.

"It was important for me to utilize my skills to ameliorate health inequities and to address those disparities in my own community," said Leaston, who recently re-married and lives in Brockton with her husband. "It is important for me to work with people that look like me and share similar cultural and life experiences as me. And for them to see me in a role that will hopefully inspire and encourage them to follow their dreams too."

During her tenure at WSHC, Leaston has led by example while building an exceptional nursing team. When the COVID-19 pandemic struck, Leaston took on a leadership role.

"When many people were nervous about the deadly impact of the virus, Melissa stepped up to help with the implementation of the COVID-19 testing," said Frederica M. Williams, President and CEO of WSHC. "She trained all the nurses and became an even stronger leader, working with providers and the Quality Assurance and Quality Improvement Team, to ensure we were following all regulatory standards."

"I have known Melissa for 14 years and have become quite impressed with her ongoing passion for our mission," added Williams. "When you look at the challenges she overcame to enter this career, it speaks to her resilience and drive. That translates to everything Melissa does here at Whittier. We are blessed to have her."

Leaston's award capped off its annual employee recognition event when the WSHC recognized other high-performing, impactful employees and teams:

BEST OF WHITTIER ANNUAL RECOGNITION AWARDS: FY 2020 FRONTLINE HEROES

President's Award
Melissa Leaston, RN, Director of Nursing and Infection Control
Officer

Provider's Award

Dr. Stephen Wright, Associate Medical Director, Primary Care
Sophia Lucien, NP, Lead Nurse Practitioner

Community Relations Award

Robert Edwards, Community Relations Manager

Customer Service Awards

Alexis Roman, Patient Care Service Representative
Rubileysi Ramos, Patient Care Service Representative
Solanny Guzman, Patient Care Service Representative
Eyrusalem Gebremariam Tesfatsion, Facilities Department

Department Award

Orange Team, Primary Care

Clinical Support Team Award

Nursing Team

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