

**Coalition for Global Hepatitis Elimination Names Rachel Gonzalez and Angela Park
as 2021 Elimination Champions**

– Rachel Gonzalez and Dr. Park led the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Hepatitis C Innovation Team (HIT) Collaborative, a national effort to expand hepatitis C treatment access –

Atlanta, GA., July 23, 2021 – In honor of World Hepatitis Day, the Coalition for Global Hepatitis Elimination is pleased to announce Rachel Gonzalez, MPH, and Angela Park, PharmD were selected as 2021 Elimination Champions for their contributions to advancing hepatitis elimination in the United States.

Gonzalez and Park were nominated by Dr. Tim Morgan, Director, National Hepatitis C Resource Center in the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), as the “real heroes” behind the program. They led the Hepatitis C Innovation Teams, hospital-based interdisciplinary teams composed of physicians, pharmacists, nurses, physician assistants, clerks, and system redesign experts that worked to identify barriers to care and to implement solutions. Park and Gonzalez also promoted use and implementation of HCV dashboards to connect and re-engage patients in care. To improve access, Park and Gonzalez collaborated with diverse programs within VA including Office of Mental Health, National Center on Homelessness among Veterans, and Office of Peer Support Services.

As a result of their efforts, VA achieved higher rates of testing and treatment of patients with hepatitis C virus than that of any other health care system in the US. During their five years of leadership, VA’s screening rate increased from approximately 65% to greater than 85%, and more than 100,000 Veterans were cured with DAA treatment.

“This award recognizes the two people who did the real work to find and cure Veterans with hepatitis C across the VA Healthcare system.” – Dr. Tim Morgan

In all, six Elimination Champions were selected across the world. The other chosen champions were:

- Dr. Mohammad Ali, Bangladesh
- Mr. Arafat Bwambale, Uganda
- Dr. John Dillon, Scotland
- Dr. Gamal Shiha, Egypt
- Dr. Alethse de la Torre Rosas, Mexico

“The Coalition salutes the Hepatitis Elimination Champions from six countries bound by a shared commitment to eliminating hepatitis as a health threat for their patients and communities. These Champions are committed to achieving health equity, the ultimate goal of hepatitis elimination, by fighting hepatitis-related stigma, advocating for government action and expanding access to hepatitis testing and treatment through capacity building and developing simplified models of care. Because of their actions and the example they set for others, the world is that much closer to the goals for eliminating hepatitis. Congratulations and thank you,” says Dr. John Ward, Director of the Coalition for Global Hepatitis Elimination.

The Elimination Champion 2021 nominations were opened from March 29th to May 24th, 2021. In all, 17 nominations were received from 15 countries. A panel of judges representing previous Elimination Champions, elimination program managers, the major liver disease professional associations, civil society, and donors assessed the nominations. Champions will receive awards by mail, and their profiles will be added to <https://www.globalhep.org/champions>.

World Hepatitis Day

World Hepatitis Day is commemorated each year on 28 July to enhance awareness of viral hepatitis, an inflammation of the liver that causes a range of health problems, including liver cancer. There are five main strains of the hepatitis virus – A, B, C, D, and E. Together, hepatitis B (HBV) and C (HCV) are the most common, with 354 million people living with HBV or HCV globally and more than 1.3 million lives lost each year. Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, viral hepatitis continues to claim thousands of lives every day. See more at <https://www.who.int/campaigns/world-hepatitis-day/2021>

Coalition for Global Hepatitis Elimination

With the availability of reliable tests, highly protective hepatitis B vaccines, effective HBV medications, and curative HCV therapies in hand, in 2016, the WHO set targets for HBV and HCV elimination by 2030. The Coalition for Global Hepatitis Elimination (CGHE) was launched in July 2019 to accelerate progress toward these goals. Modeled after other disease elimination initiatives managed by the Task Force for Global Health, CGHE aims to strengthen the capacity of national and subnational hepatitis elimination programs through advocacy, technical assistance, knowledge generation, and dissemination among partners united in a community of practice. Find out more at www.globalhep.org.

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