



27TH ANNUAL AWARDS PROGRAM

Health Care Heroes® Awards Program celebrates 27 years of recognizing and honoring the tremendous efforts, dedication and achievements of our health care professionals, first responders, institutions and volunteers as well as others who have contributed to the health care delivery system and overall welfare of South Florida and its residents.

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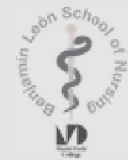


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MAY 14, 2026

TO HEALTH CARE HEROES SUPPORTERS:

South Florida is rapidly emerging as a global hub for top-quality healthcare, and the Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce has been at the forefront of industry's evolution. Our annual Health Care Heroes celebration stands as a testament to the visionary leaders who have contributed to this remarkable growth and continue to shape a promising future for our region.

For 27 years, *Health Care Heroes* has been the premier community gathering honoring our local healthcare professionals. At this event, we recognize the exceptional contributions of physicians, nurses, researchers, institutions, volunteers, and many others, alongside key stakeholders from hospital systems, physician groups, managed care providers, biomedical innovators, and service suppliers—key pillars of the healthcare economy.

There may be no industry evolving as rapidly as healthcare, and no local economy better positioned to harness the power of that change. South Florida is also uniquely vulnerable to business and regulatory movement due to our unique population. That's why it's more important than ever for the healthcare leaders of South Florida to find common ground and work together in ways that benefit all our neighbors. That work starts with close, collaborative relationships that celebrate our shared success at events like *Health Care Heroes*.

This year, we are proud to commemorate the 27th anniversary of the *Health Care Heroes*® Awards program, which honors the tireless dedication and outstanding achievements of our healthcare professionals and first responders. The luncheon will celebrate those who have made significant contributions to healthcare delivery and the overall well-being of South Florida's residents.

We are thrilled to celebrate this incredible journey and rewarding partnership between Equitable Advisors and the Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce for three decades. Consistent partners like Equitable Advisors are the foundation for us to strengthen and grow our healthcare community.

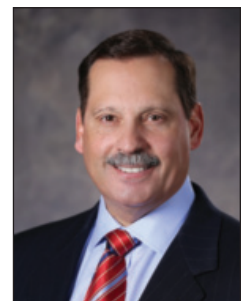
Each year, we see a growing number of exceptional nominees, and the caliber of talent continues to make it increasingly difficult for our judges to select one recipient from each category. This is a testament to the relentless pursuit of excellence that defines this honor and, indeed, the mission of healthcare in South Florida and around the world.

Thank you for being part of this exciting and transformative journey. We look forward to celebrating our collective successes at this year's event.




Evelyn Terrell, OTD, MHSA, OTR/L
Chairman, Healthcare Committee
Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce

Sincerely,




Luis G. Chiappy, CFP, CLU, ChFC, LUTCF
Executive President, Southeast Complex
Senior Manager, South Florida Branch
Equitable Advisors, LLC
Founding Sponsor, Health Care Heroes®

Our
Health Care Hero



Miami Beach Community Health Center Board of Directors and staff extend their heartfelt congratulations to **Dr. Mark Rabinowitz**, Chief Executive Officer and Chief Medical Officer, for being a **2026 Health Care Heroes** finalist in the Health Care Professional category.

Miami Beach Community Health Center provides its patients with a patient-centered medical home with high quality, affordable primary health care and specialty services, chronic disease management, and support services.



Miami Beach Community Health Center
11645 Biscayne Boulevard • Miami, Florida
305-538-8835 • www.mymbchc.org

JUDGES

Lucie Dlugasch, PhD, APRN, FAANP
Clinical Professor, Assistant Chair Graduate Nursing
Nicole Wertheim College of Nursing and Health Sciences
Florida International University

Ryan R. Hawkins, MSW, MPA, MBA
President & CEO
Jessie Trice Community Health System

Heather M. Jonczak, Esq.
Shareholder
Carlton Fields, PA

Alwyn Leiba, PhD, MBA-HCM, FADHA
President, Medical Campus
Miami Dade College

Jorge Martinez
Senior Regional Communications Lead
Florida Blue

Bridget Pelaez, MSN, MA, FNP-BC, EMT-P, CEM
Senior Director, Disaster & Emergency Preparedness
Jackson Health System

Danay Rodriguez-Arritola, DNP, MBA, PMHNP, A-GNP-C, MSN, BSN
Chief Nursing Officer
Vice President Patient Clinical Services
Larkin Health System

Miriam Singer
President & Chief Executive Officer
Jewish Community Services of South Florida

EQUITABLE ADVISORS LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD RECIPIENT

CARLOS A. MIGOYA
CEO, JACKSON HEALTH SYSTEM



When families across Miami-Dade County have faced their most vulnerable moments—medical emergencies and trauma, complex diagnoses, or the fear of not knowing where to turn—Jackson Health System has been there. Behind Miami’s only public health system stands its chief executive officer, Carlos A. Migoya, a healthcare leader whose 15 years of service have transformed Jackson into a nationally respected public academic health system.

Mr. Migoya didn’t join Jackson for money or fame, but rather because he wanted to help the struggling public health system. His son’s life was saved in the neonatal intensive care unit in 1978; his mother donated a kidney to his aunt in the 1980s; and his own hand was saved at Ryder Trauma Center following a bicycling accident.

When Mr. Migoya assumed leadership of Jackson Health System, it was facing a crisis that extended far beyond balance sheets. Financial instability, governance challenges, and declining public confidence threatened the future of Miami-Dade County’s only public hospital system. In his first year as CEO, he reversed years of massive losses—including an \$82 million loss the prior year—and delivered a surplus of more than \$8 million, marking the first true surplus since 2006. He brought disciplined financial stewardship, transparency, and accountability to an organization that desperately needed stability and effective leadership. The system has earned a surplus every year since.

In 2012, Mr. Migoya led a campaign in which 63 percent of Miami-Dade voters approved the \$830 million Jackson Miracle-Building Bond program—the cornerstone of a 10-year, \$1.7 billion capital plan to renovate, modernize, and expand Jackson’s facilities. Since then, Jackson Health System has grown into a comprehensive, seven-hospital network anchored by Jackson Memorial Hospital, one of the most respected hospitals in Florida. The system also includes three community hospitals, multiple UHealth Jackson Urgent Care centers, two nursing homes, primary and specialty care clinics, and Corrections Health Services. In April, Jackson opened one of the largest and most innovative emergency rooms in the nation at Jackson Memorial Hospital, transforming emergency care in downtown Miami.

Under his leadership, Jackson has held true to its mission of providing one standard of quality care to all Miami-Dade residents, remaining a lifeline for patients regardless of income, insurance, or immigration status. By forging innovative partnerships with community organizations and government agencies, Jackson has implemented programs to

combat food insecurity, homelessness, and transportation barriers. These community-focused initiatives have improved patient outcomes, while reducing emergency department utilization, lowering readmissions, and enabling earlier intervention for chronic diseases.

He also helped expand access to advanced medicine and technology across the health system, including specialized services and the recruitment of world-renowned leaders in medicine. One of his most enduring contributions has been the intentional cultivation of a culture rooted in integrity, accountability, collaboration, and compassion for Jackson’s workforce of more than 15,000 employees. Mr. Migoya prioritizes workforce stability and leadership development, investing in training, mentorship, and succession planning to ensure that Jackson’s future leaders reflect the diversity, values, and mission of the community it serves. His forward-thinking approach also includes a comprehensive internal transformation that saves Jackson \$160 million annually through strategic process improvements, smarter resource allocation, and more effective team collaboration—all accomplished without workforce reductions.

Mr. Migoya has consistently acted as a steward and advocate for public healthcare, engaging directly with policymakers in Tallahassee, civic leaders, and business stakeholders to ensure sustained public support for Jackson. He has taken personal ownership of Jackson’s mission and success—not only as a professional obligation, but as a personally held responsibility to uphold the standard of an institution that saved his son’s life.

“Through vision, integrity, disciplined leadership, and an unwavering commitment to high-quality, safe patient care, Carlos Migoya has ensured that world-class medicine and compassionate care remain accessible to all, making his impact on health care in South Florida, and his legacy at Jackson Health System, truly unforgettable.”

*David Zambrana
President and Chief Operating Officer
Jackson Health System*

A Legacy Worth Celebrating

Carlos A. Migoya

Nicklaus Children’s Health System proudly joins the South Florida healthcare community in honoring Carlos A. Migoya on the occasion of his retirement from Jackson Health System. His steady leadership, vision, and commitment to the people of Miami-Dade County have left an enduring mark on our community.

Congratulations and thank you, Mr. Migoya, on a remarkable career.



**Nicklaus Children’s
Health System**

Where Your Child Matters Most™

HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS

MARISA AZARET, PSYD

Director, Department of Clinical Psychology
Nicklaus Children's Hospital

Dr. Marisa Azaret has devoted more than 30 years to advancing pediatric psychology by creating programs and services that address the complex emotional, behavioral, and developmental needs of children and families. She leads a multidisciplinary team, most bilingual, providing culturally competent care across inpatient, outpatient, and virtual settings. She has spearheaded initiatives including CASA assessments, eating disorders programs, interdisciplinary clinics, NICU/CICU family support, the Pediatric Behavioral Health Network, and other specialized services, expanding access for thousands of children annually. Dr. Azaret leverages her expertise to educate and empower families, both locally and internationally.

She has hosted three Emmy-winning and six Emmy-nominated programs on CNN en Español, Univision, and Telemundo, and created a mindful meditation YouTube series designed to help adults and children manage post-pandemic anxiety and stress. She has delivered 50-plus presentations across the U.S. and Latin America on child development, behavioral health, and family wellness.

She leads community initiatives such as the Safe & Sound Digital Safety Alliance, anti-bullying campaigns with the Special Olympics in Guatemala and Panama, and child-protection advocacy with From Darkness to Light, reaching thousands locally and millions globally. Dr. Azaret has trained and mentored dozens of psychologists and trainees, many now serving in leadership or frontline roles nationwide.

She actively serves on advisory boards, councils, and nonprofit initiatives that promote mental health literacy, child safety, and wellness. Her professional excellence and community dedication have been recognized with three Emmy Awards, six Emmy nominations, and two Sentinel Awards. Beyond her accolades, she is celebrated for her compassion, vision, and ability to inspire colleagues, families, and communities to prioritize the emotional well-being of children.



"Dr. Marisa Azaret shows an unwavering commitment to advancing pediatric mental health, empowering families, and proactively safeguarding children's well-being; locally and beyond through innovation, collaboration, and compassionate leadership."

Liliana Oliveros
Associate Director for
Governmental & Community
Affairs, Nicklaus Children's
Health System

**MARK RABINOWITZ, MD,
FACOG**

Chief Executive Officer & Chief Medical Officer
Miami Beach Community Health Center

During the past 13 years as Interim and then Chief Executive Officer at Miami Beach Community Health Center, Dr. Mark Rabinowitz' focus has been on providing a patient-centered medical home for Miami-Dade County residents to receive primary medical care and social services. During his tenure, the number of patients helped has more than doubled from 24,666 to over 50,000. Dr. Rabinowitz is a tireless advocate for excellence in health care quality for the underserved, believing that one's financial circumstances should not dictate the quality of care received.

As a board member of Health Choice Network, Dr. Rabinowitz facilitated the incorporation of best practices across member health centers. His expertise is frequently sought by other community health centers seeking technical assistance to improve their own clinical quality measures. Through the ongoing commitment of Dr. Rabinowitz to Health Choice Network, South Florida health center affiliates have risen to be among the finest community health centers in the nation, and their patients have benefited by increased access to high-quality health care and better health outcomes.

Dr. Rabinowitz is a champion of medical education, believing that exposing aspiring health professionals to community health centers will inspire them to work with underserved populations. To address the physician shortage, Dr. Rabinowitz promoted the development of an Advanced Practice Provider residency program at MBCHC to train recently licensed nurse practitioners. Graduates of this program are well prepared to practice independently and treat the complex medical conditions of a medically disadvantaged population. Currently, MBCHC has the first and only primary care nurse practitioner residency program in South Florida. MBCHC trains a wide range of medical professionals to work in areas of critical need, including medical students, medical residents, nurse practitioners and physician assistants.



"At Miami Beach Community Health Center, Inc. (MBCHC), Dr. Mark Rabinowitz has championed access to affordable high-quality health care for underserved and uninsured populations in Miami-Dade County. He is a leader concerned for the improvement of lives of Miami-Dade County residents."

Sorangely Menjivar, RN, MSN
Chief Operating Officer
Miami Beach Community
Health Center, Inc.

RODRIGO RUANO, MD, PhD

Director, Fetal Care Center & Division Chief
UHealth Jackson Maternal-Fetal Medicine
Jackson Health System,
Holtz Children's Hospital

Dr. Rodrigo Ruano is an internationally recognized fetal surgeon and maternal-fetal medicine leader whose work is transforming high-risk pregnancy and fetal care in South Florida. Since joining Jackson Health System and UHealth—University of Miami Health System in January 2022, he has rapidly expanded access to specialized maternal-fetal services; built the UHealth Jackson Fetal Care Center, a multidisciplinary fetal center that coordinates prenatal diagnosis through postnatal treatment; and brought advanced fetal interventions to South Florida. Under his leadership, the UHealth Jackson Fetal Care Center is supported by dedicated nurse coordinators, nurse practitioners, and an expanded team of expert sonographers.

The center is built around a multidisciplinary approach where high-risk and rare pregnancies are evaluated with state-of-the-art ultrasound technology and imaging, diagnoses are confirmed with precision and detail, and an entire team of specialists is assembled to take care of mom and baby before birth to map out prenatal management and postnatal care. Just as importantly, Dr. Ruano expanded access to care beyond downtown Miami by growing community-based clinics in Kendall and Doral, so pregnant patients can access specialized maternal-fetal expertise closer to home. Some of the FDA-approved fetal procedures now available at UHealth Jackson Fetal Care Center were pioneered by Dr. Ruano, making these successful fetal interventions the first of their kind to be performed in South Florida, including fetoscopic endoluminal tracheal occlusion for congenital diaphragmatic hernia.

Other extraordinary contributions include advancing in-utero treatment for Vein of Galen malformation (VOGM), a rare and life-threatening fetal vascular condition, and expanding Ex Utero Intrapartum Treatment (EXIT) procedures, which allow surgeons to treat life-threatening fetal conditions at the moment of delivery while maintaining placental circulation. The result of Dr. Ruano's work in South Florida is a transformation in what's possible for pregnant women and their families in our community: improved survival rates, enhanced quality of life, and restored hope.



"For families, the moment they're told that something is wrong with their unborn baby is devastating. In those moments, fear accelerates, the future feels uncertain, and hope may seem lost. Dr. Ruano has devoted his career to meeting families at that moment—when a pregnancy becomes complicated, and hope is fragile—and helping them find a path forward."

Ignacio Caballero
Vice President, Pediatric and Women's Services
Holtz Children's Hospital/The Women's
Hospital at Jackson Memorial



NURSES

**MARIE O. ETIENNE, DNP, ARNP, FNP, PNP, D. MIN. (H.C.),
PLNC, FADLN**
Professor of Nursing
Miami Dade College

As a tenured full professor at Miami Dade College's Benjamin Leon School of Nursing, where she has mentored countless students, Dr. Marie O. Etienne has set a foundation for the next generation of health-care professionals. Her contributions to academia go beyond teaching—she has developed innovative courses and programs that prepare nursing students to meet the dynamic challenges in healthcare today.

Dr. Etienne achieved a historical breakthrough by becoming the first Minority Nurse President of the Florida Nurses Association (FNA) (2023-2025) since its founding in 1909. This is not merely an academic honor; it is a full-time, high-stakes advocacy role that places her at the forefront of policymaking for over 440,000 registered nurses statewide. This sustained, high-level advocacy for legislative change, staffing ratios, and scope of practice issues for Advanced

Practice Registered Nurses (APRNs) directly ensure that the diverse, complex healthcare needs of South Florida are prioritized in Tallahassee, an influence that profoundly transcends her campus responsibilities. In the realm of public health, Dr. Etienne's achievements are equally commendable. She has spearheaded humanitarian medical missions to underserved communities both locally and internationally, ensuring that those who have little access to healthcare receive the support they need.

Dr. Etienne has channeled her expertise directly into community health through her leadership in the Haitian American Nurses Association of Florida, Inc. (HANA), serving as past president for both the Florida Chapter and the Haitian Alliance Nurses Association International, Inc. (HANA-I). Leveraging these roles, she has spearheaded frequent, vital community health fairs and medical missions in underserved South Florida neighborhoods like Little Haiti and parts of Broward County.

Her leadership in founding Global Innovative Foundation, a nonprofit organization that provides essential resources to survivors of human trafficking, domestic violence, and gun violence, further underscores her commitment to uplifting the most vulnerable among us. Her advocacy for equitable healthcare practices and her role as a member of the American Nurses Association's National Commission to Address Racism in Nursing demonstrate her commitment to addressing systemic injustices.



“Dr. Marie O. Etienne’s tireless dedication to health-care, education, and community service reflects the very essence of public leadership and servant-driven advocacy.”

Katherine Fernandez Rundle
State Attorney
Office of the State Attorney

“Through unwavering commitment to both the nursing profession and the community, Dr. Marie O. Etienne inspires widespread efforts to enhance the quality of healthcare, discovering innovative solutions to assist those most in need. Her sustained, multi-layered leadership - encompassing historic policy change, hands-on community care, systemic social justice intervention, and education - demonstrates a scope of impact and personal investment far exceeding any defined job description.”

Guillermo R. Valdes DNP, MSN-HCS, PGC-NEd., MEDSURG -BC, RN
Department Chair, RN to BSN Program
Benjamin Leon School of Nursing, Miami Dade College
Florida Nurses Association, South Region Director

JESSICA C. LEON, BSN, RN, CWCN
Founder of The Horacio León Jr. Water Safety Project
Emergency Department Nurse
Jackson West Medical Center

Jessica C. Leon, BSN, RN, is a certified wound care nurse and an emergency department nurse at Jackson West Medical Center, whose impact reaches far beyond the walls of the hospital. Born and raised in Miami, Ms. Leon is a clinician, educator, and determined community advocate who has turned heart-break into action with life-saving public safety changes and policies across two states. Through water safety education, drowning prevention outreach, and advocacy, Jessica is addressing a crisis that's often overlooked until tragedy strikes. In July 2018, Jessica's father, Horacio Leon Jr., drowned in Lake Michigan in Chicago; the same day, a 13-year-old also drowned in Lake Michigan.



“Jessica Leon’s advocacy work is voluntary, self-driven, and personally funded. She does not do this work for recognition; she does it because she knows what happens when resources are missing and time runs out. She is preventing tragedies before they become emergency visits, ICU admissions, or death notifications—an impact that’s profoundly aligned with the mission of health care.”

Mercedes Dominguez, MSN, RN
Director of Emergency Services
Jackson West Medical Center of
Jackson Health System

Ms. Leon realized what many people don't: drowning can happen even to strong swimmers, and “knowing how to swim” is not a guarantee of safety from drowning. Rather than allowing grief to consume her, Ms. Leon founded The Horacio Leon Jr. Water Safety Project, a nonprofit focused on water safety and water rescue education for schools and community organizations. For years, Ms. Leon met with aldermen, confronted bureaucracy, and challenged the belief that rescue stations were unnecessary, unclear, or too risky, and after four years of persistence, pressure, and public accountability, she succeeded in getting Chicago to install 100-plus water rescue stations along the 26-mile Lake Michigan shoreline.

She then took her advocacy to Miami-Dade County, meeting with commissioners who unanimously passed a bill mandating water rescue stations in Miami-Dade-owned waterways. Working in Tallahassee, she developed bills focused on mandating age-appropriate water safety education for K-12 public school students, using free American Red Cross programming that wouldn't add taxpayer costs. She also drafted bills to help strengthen first-response capacity, including proposals that advocated for trained divers in first responder teams and units. Her work directly strengthens the health and safety ecosystem in Miami-Dade County by preventing emergencies that would otherwise end in tragedy.

Congratulations
to Carlos Migoya



Your impact and leadership in our healthcare community has had a profound impact on the individuals and institutions throughout your illustrious career. Best wishes on your retirement and the exciting chapters ahead.



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NURSES

ELIZABETH L. VIEITO-SMITH, DNP, RN
 Chief Nursing Officer
 UHealth - University of Miami Health System

Elizabeth L. Vieito-Smith, DNP, RN, is a transformational nursing leader whose career spans nearly 50 years. She currently serves as chief nursing officer of UHealth, associate dean for Academic Health Centers Integration, and a faculty member at the University of Miami School of Nursing & Health Studies (SONHS).

Under her guidance, UHealth became the region's only academic-based health system and the first in Florida to earn Magnet with Distinction® from the American Nurses Credentialing Center's Magnet Recognition Program®. This achievement places UHealth in the top 1 percent of U.S. hospitals and reflects a strong commitment to patient care, innovative nursing, and a supportive environment for nurses. Dr. Smith pioneered the Admission/Discharge/Transfer Nurse role, making UHealth one of the first health systems in the U.S. to offer a title focused on creating a seamless inpatient experience. This initiative has led to improved quality of care, greater staff and patient satisfaction, and reduced hospital readmission rates.

She also led the introduction of long-wave infrared thermography to prevent hospital-acquired pressure injuries (HAPI) in inpatient settings, a complication impacting more than 2.5 million inpatients annually. Since implementing this technology systemwide, UHealth has maintained a HAPI rate of just 0.01 percent, far exceeding national benchmarks.

Dr. Smith has deepened UHealth's partnership with the SONHS by launching robust professional development programs, expanding opportunities for advanced education, and creating clear pathways for nurses to grow as leaders. Dr. Smith ensures that UHealth nurses are equipped not only to deliver exceptional patient care but also to shape the future of the profession. As a result, approximately 86 percent of UHealth nurses now hold a bachelor's degree, and those holding specialty certifications have increased to 44 percent over the last two years. During her tenure, voluntary turnover decreased by 35 percent during fiscal years 2022-2025, showing steady improvement in employee retention.

“Dr. Elizabeth Vieito-Smith’s compassion, vision, and commitment to excellence have elevated nursing practice and patient care across UHealth.



Her leadership has fostered a culture of excellence and collaboration grounded in evidence-based practice, encouraging personal well-being and professional growth among nursing staff to deliver the highest quality patient care.”

*Kymerlee J. Manni,
 PhD, RCIS*

*Chief Executive Officer, University of Miami Hospital and Clinics
 UHealth – University of Miami Health System*

INDIVIDUALS OF MERIT

REDMOND BURKE, MD
 Former Chief, Cardiovascular Surgery,
 Heart Institute
 Retired
 Nicklaus Children's Hospital



For three decades, Dr. Redmond P. Burke has fundamentally reshaped how congenital heart surgery is delivered, measured, and imagined—for his patients at Nicklaus Children's Hospital and for children around the world. Since 1995, Dr. Burke has led and guided the cardiovascular surgery program at Nicklaus Children's, building it from a regional program into a nationally recognized Heart Institute. He has performed 6,700 surgeries on patients with congenital heart disease, taking on some of the most complex and high-risk cases. Under his leadership, the Heart Institute has maintained a congenital heart surgery survival rate of approximately 97.5 percent for the past eight years, positioning Nicklaus Children's among the top programs in Florida and beyond. This level of performance reflects relentless innovation, continuous quality improvement, and a culture Dr. Burke created where every child's outcome is tracked, analyzed, and used to make the next operation safer. Dr. Burke re-imagined how a heart program could function by pioneering real-time outcomes reporting and building one of the nation's first web-based transparency systems for congenital heart surgery.

He also led the creation of secure “internet rounds” and early family access to electronic records—visionary innovations that transformed pediatric cardiac care and set new standards for collaboration, accountability, and patient-centered care. Earlier in his career, he helped pioneer minimally invasive pediatric cardiac surgery and performed several “firsts” in endoscopic congenital heart procedures at Boston Children's. In Miami, he extended that spirit by integrating hybrid surgical-catheter approaches and developing less traumatic techniques to reduce the burden of a child's treatment over a lifetime. Nicklaus Children's became one of the first programs in the nation to adopt 3D printing for surgical planning in pediatric heart disease and using virtual reality tools such as Google Cardboard to visualize intricate anatomy in infants considered inoperable elsewhere.

Dr. Burke also performed the first-in-the-nation heart valve replacement on a premature infant using CorMatrix extracellular matrix material, offering the potential for a living valve that can remodel and grow with the child, reducing the need for multiple future valve replacements.

“Dr. Burke’s career is defined not only by longevity, but by sustained excellence, selfless leadership, and an enduring commitment to advancing pediatric cardiac care. His impact is woven into the culture of our institution and lives on through the many professionals he mentored and inspired.”

*Melissa Marquez,
 MBA, MSN, FACHE
 Executive Director,
 Heart Institute
 Nicklaus Children's Hospital*

PHILIP LEITMAN
 Co-Founder and Board Member
 NTM Info & Research



There is a particular pain and helplessness that comes from watching the person you love struggle to take a full breath. For longtime Miami resident Philip Leitman, that experience became the driving force behind a healthcare movement that has changed lives not only in South Florida, but far beyond. NTM Info & Research was co-founded by Mr. Leitman and his late wife, Fern, following her nearly two-decade battle with pulmonary nontuberculous mycobacterial (NTM) disease, a rare, complex, and often misdiagnosed lung infection. Her journey exposed a critical gap in medical awareness and patient support, one that Mr. Leitman, with his late wife Fern, committed to closing. NTM Info & Research now impacts tens of thousands of people, not just in South Florida, but nationally and internationally.

Mr. Leitman has driven major national advancements in NTM and bronchiectasis care, including funding groundbreaking epidemiology studies, expanding the Bronchiectasis Registry, facilitating treatment access (such as clofazimine), and ensuring the patient voice is represented in FDA advisory meetings. He has collaborated on ground-breaking, peer-reviewed research, advancing the literature, knowledge, and intervention of NTM. He also built the first comprehensive support and education infrastructure for NTM patients, leading to more than 3,400 active members on the NTM Connect platform, thousands of educational touchpoints through support groups and webinars, and widespread distribution of trusted patient resources used across the U.S.

Due to the dearth of patient targeted information about NTM, in collaboration with leading medical professionals, Mr. Leitman also developed Insight, a widely distributed informational pamphlet focused on NTM. To date, more than 100,000 Insight pamphlets have been distributed to patients and doctors' offices free of charge; the pamphlet is also available digitally.

“Philip Leitman’s contributions are not symbolic; they are measurable, sustained, and deeply personal. From his base in Miami, he built NTMIR into a trusted resource for patients, providers, and researchers alike. His work has changed care pathways, informed policy, advanced research, and, most importantly, given thousands of patients hope and a voice.”

*Katelyn Rozenbroek
 Development Coordinator
 NTM Info & Research*

INDIVIDUALS OF MERIT

JOANNE RUGGIERO, DNP, MBA, MA, NE-BC

SVP and Chief Executive Officer
Jackson Memorial Medical Center

As a young girl raised by a single mother who anchored her family in faith and service, Joanne Ruggiero learned early that adversity doesn't get the final word—it shapes your purpose. As a child, Ms. Ruggiero endured years of sexual abuse—a trauma that could have defined her life by limitation. Instead, through counseling, faith, and an unwavering support system, Joanne learned that healing is possible and that stories, when shared, can save others. As a teenager, Joanne became a young mother while still in high school. Rather than derailing her path, motherhood became her motivation.

Trained as a labor and delivery nurse, Ms. Ruggiero became known early on for her instinct to step forward when systems weren't working for patients or staff. When she joined Jackson Health System in 2021—first as chief nursing and chief operating officer of Holtz Children's Hospital and The Women's Hospital at Jackson Memorial, her impact was immediate and measurable: advancing evidence-based maternity care, reducing C-section rates, addressing racial disparities in maternal outcomes, and restoring pride and purpose among clinical teams.

Under her leadership, Jackson confronted long-standing disparities in maternal health outcomes by examining data through the lens of race, ethnicity, and social determinants of health. She asked hard questions about maternal morbidity, C-section rates, transfusion practices, and disparities affecting Black and Brown mothers. She reframed inequity as a system-design problem, one that required standardized protocols, shared accountability, and psychological safety for teams to change their practices. As a result, women's services at Holtz Children's Hospital/The Women's Hospital at Jackson Memorial achieved dramatic reductions in C-section rates and eliminated key racial disparities in maternal outcomes—milestones that reflect not just policy change, but cultural transformation.

Ms. Ruggiero also championed doula integration into Jackson Memorial Hospital, and ultimately the system as a whole, and garnered important community partnerships with organizations like the Health Foundation of South

Florida, ultimately leading to the launch of the RHISE (Reducing Hypertension in Pregnant and Postpartum Women through Interventions and Supportive Education) program at Jackson



“Joanne Ruggiero’s impact can’t be measured solely by titles, metrics, or rankings.



It’s measured in trust rebuilt, disparities

reduced, families supported, and communities strengthened. She leads not because she must, but because she believes deeply in her faith and the moral obligation of health care to heal beyond walls, beyond systems, and beyond expectations.”

*Hamilton Clark
Senior Vice President for Hospital Operations
Jackson Health System*

RECOGNIZING THE BEST OF THE BEST IN THE HEALTH CARE COMMUNITY



27th ANNUAL HEALTH CARE HEROES AWARDS LUNCHEON

SAVE THE DATE

MAY 14, 2026
JUNGLE ISLAND
11:15 AM - 1:30 PM

AWARD CATEGORIES:

- HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONAL
- NURSE
- INDIVIDUAL OF MERIT
- ORGANIZATION/PROGRAM
- FIRST RESPONDER
- YOUTH VOLUNTEER
- EQUITABLE ADVISORS LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

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\$115 per person | \$1,000 table of 10

Contact: Tania Valenzuela at tvalenzuela@miamichamber.com or 305-577-5491 or visit www.MiamiChamber.com

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ORGANIZATIONS/PROGRAMS

HCA FLORIDA KENDALL HOSPITAL TRAUMA PROGRAM

As a Level I Adult and Pediatric Trauma Center and verified burn center, HCA Florida Kendall Hospital provides the highest level of care available to the most critically ill patients in the region, with expertise in treating the most serious and complex injuries. HCA Florida Kendall Hospital has achieved some of the best patient outcomes in the country, including top outcomes nationally for severe traumatic brain injury and the lowest trauma mortality rate in the United States. These distinctions reflect the program's clinical excellence and patient-centered approach to care. The trauma program is built on innovation, advanced technology, and multidisciplinary collaboration.

HCA Florida Kendall Hospital is a leader in chest wall reconstruction and rib fixation, offering state-of-the-art care that includes minimally invasive stabilization and complex reconstruction. Additionally, the hospital has more surgical robots (13) than any other hospital in the region, reflecting the facility's commitment to investing in the latest, cutting-edge technologies to optimize patient outcomes.

A defining strength of HCA Florida Kendall Hospital's trauma program is its team-based approach. Trauma surgeons, critical care physicians, emergency medicine specialists, neurosurgeons, orthopedic surgeons, anesthesiologists, radiologists, nurses, and rehabilitation experts work together in real time to make critical decisions. This collaborative model enhances safety, improves outcomes, and elevates the experience for both adult and pediatric populations.

The hospital's impact extends far beyond its walls. HCA Florida Kendall Hospital actively participates in EMS education, trauma prevention, community outreach, statewide trauma leadership, and quality improvement initiatives, reinforcing its role as a leader in trauma system development. Its national reputation is further reinforced by major recognitions, including being named one of Healthgrades' America's 50 Best Hospitals for 2026 and being ranked by Fortune as the No. 4 Best Major Teaching Hospital in the United States.



"HCA Florida Kendall Hospital's Trauma Program represents the highest standard of trauma care in Florida and one of the most advanced trauma systems in the nation."

Ben Harris
Chief Executive Officer
HCA Florida Kendall Hospital



HPVAWARE

Garrett Forman, MD/MPH candidate at the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine, is improving cancer prevention and early detection in Miami's underserved communities.

As the founder of HPVAware, a community-centered public health initiative designed to prevent HPV-related cancers through education on risk factors and prevention, his organization provides free, culturally relevant HPV education in neighborhoods like Overtown and North Miami Beach, helping families access life-saving information about a virus that causes several preventable cancers.

HPVAware was created because of Mr. Forman's firsthand experiences working in clinics and schools throughout Miami-Dade County, where he repeatedly encountered patients, youth, and families who lacked basic information about HPV, vaccination schedules, and early cancer symptoms. Through interactive, age-appropriate presentations, HPVAware has reached hundreds of Miami students. Mr. Forman's dedication to Miami also extends beyond education into research aimed at improving local health outcomes.

He has co-authored more than 10 peer-reviewed scientific publications, many of which examine the structural and socioeconomic factors that affect cancer detection in Florida. His studies show that Miami's low-income communities, particularly Black and uninsured residents, face significantly higher risks of late-stage cancer diagnosis because of limited specialist access, transportation barriers, insurance coverage gaps, and environmental exposures.

Mr. Forman also contributed to research focused on salivary biomarkers for early detection of head and neck cancers. This innovation is especially meaningful in Miami, where many residents in underserved neighborhoods face long waits for appointments or have difficulty accessing specialty care.

Mr. Forman is also dedicated to researching environmental health; he has contributed to statewide research examining patterns of PFAS contamination and thyroid cancer risk that revealed that communities facing socioeconomic disadvantage bear a higher burden of exposure. These findings support ongoing environmental justice efforts and provide evidence for policymakers seeking to address pollution in vulnerable neighborhoods.

"What distinguishes Garrett Forman is his unwavering commitment to serving Miami, not only in a clinical capacity but also as a community advocate, educator, and researcher. He does not wait for patients to come to the hospital. Instead, through HPVAware, he brings education, prevention, and compassionate engagement directly into the neighborhoods where disparities are greatest."

Patricia Garcia
Product Manager/Founder
American Express



THE MIAMI PROJECT TO CURE PARALYSIS AT UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI MILLER SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

For more than 40 years, The Miami Project to Cure Paralysis at the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine has stood at the forefront of neurological research, setting a global standard for how basic science can be translated into clinical breakthroughs that change lives and redefine the practice of medicine.

Founded in 1985, The Miami Project's vision was bold: to unite world-class experts under one roof, fostering collaboration across disciplines to accelerate the discovery and implementation of new neurotherapeutics.

This commitment to leadership and innovation has not only advanced the field of paralysis research but has also expanded the boundaries of what is possible in neurotrauma and neurodegenerative medicine. The Miami Project's journey began with a deep investment in basic science, particularly in the study of Schwann cells. Years of rigorous preclinical work laid the groundwork for a historic milestone: in 2012, the FDA granted Investigational New Drug (IND) authorization for The Miami Project to become the first group to transplant Schwann cells into a human spinal cord at the site of injury.

Building on its initial success, The Miami Project rapidly expanded its clinical trial portfolio, embracing all three FDA therapeutic categories—devices, drugs, and biologics—and addressing the full continuum of care. From acute surgical interventions designed to protect neurological function, to outpatient rehabilitation optimizing recovery, and long-term lifestyle medicine managing chronic comorbidities,

The Miami Project's comprehensive approach ensures that every stage of patient care benefits from the latest scientific advances. In 2013, the organization ventured into medical devices with an implanted brain-computer interface (BCI) trial, followed by a groundbreaking deep brain stimulation (DBS) study in 2017 targeting neuropathic pain and autonomic dysreflexia. These device-based interventions have continued to evolve, with recent collaborations—including serving as a site for Neuralink's PRIME trial and FDA approval for a DBS study aimed at restoring walking in incomplete paraplegics—demonstrating the Miami Project's ongoing leadership in cutting-edge clinical research.

"Through visionary leadership, relentless pursuit of innovation, and a commitment to collaboration, The Miami Project continues to change people's lives and reshape the practice of medicine—proving that decades of focused scientific research can indeed lead to breakthroughs that matter and help change the practice of medicine."

Scott Roy
Director of Communications
The Miami Project to Cure Paralysis at the
University of Miami Miller School of
Medicine

FIRST RESPONDERS

OMAR BLANCO

Florida State Representative
HCA Kendall Board of Trustees Member
Fire Rescue/Firefighter Captain
Miami-Dade County Fire Department



"Omar Blanco's career reflects a deep commitment to saving lives and promoting public health—a perspective that enriches his legislative work and priorities in health-related areas."

Ben Harris
Chief Executive Officer
HCA Florida Kendall Hospital

Rep. Omar Blanco was elected to the Florida House of Representatives for District 115 in November 2024. Born and raised in Miami, FL, he is a captain with the Miami-Dade County Fire Department and brings real-world leadership and a deep, firsthand commitment to public service. Rep. Blanco's 20-plus years as a firefighter and emergency responder give him firsthand insight into health risks faced by first responders and the community. Before serving in the Florida House, Rep. Blanco used his experience as a Miami-Dade Fire Rescue captain and union president to raise awareness about high cancer risk among firefighters and help push for legislation (Senate Bill 426) that expanded benefits and coverage for firefighters diagnosed with cancer. This effort has directly supported first responders' health and financial security after cancer diagnoses linked to their work. His experience on the front lines has shaped his legislative priorities, as he continues to advocate for policies that uplift small businesses, strengthen communities, and improve the everyday lives of Floridians. During his campaign and in his current role, Rep. Blanco has emphasized protecting seniors and families as part of his public service agenda. He currently sits on the State Affairs Committee, the Information Technology Budget and Policy Subcommittee, the Civil Justice and Claims Subcommittee, the Higher Education Subcommittee, and the Student Academic Success Subcommittee. From his distinguished career as a fire captain—earning recognition as the 2020 Florida Professional Firefighter of the Year as part of the 2021 Fire Service Awards—to his continued service in the Florida House, Rep. Blanco exemplifies a lifelong commitment to serving others.

JEANETTE HARRINGTON

Lieutenant/Paramedic
Miami-Dade Fire Rescue



"Family, tradition, and community remain at the core of who Jeanette Harrington is. She embodies the values of love, connection, and resilience in everything she does."

Nicolas Morgado
Division Chief
Miami-Dade Fire Rescue

Born in Philadelphia, PA, and raised in Panama, Republic of Panama, Jeanette Harrington is the daughter of a Puerto Rican father and a Panamanian mother, and the youngest of four. From an early age, her family instilled in her and her siblings the importance of hard work, perseverance, helping others, and giving back to the community. For the past 23 years, she has proudly served as a lieutenant/paramedic with Miami-Dade Fire Rescue—an achievement that did not come easily. Along the way, she faced many obstacles that could have deterred her, but those values, rooted deeply in her upbringing, kept her focused on her ultimate childhood goal: becoming a firefighter. Ms. Harrington takes pride in making a difference in her community by being there for those during their most difficult moments. She has contributed by participating in programs like the Cadet Program, where she mentored and motivated future first responders with the same dedication and perseverance that have defined her professional journey. As a certified instructor, she has also trained her fellow officers on programs and processes that enhance their skills, support their professional development, and help them perform their job duties more effectively. She also has a passion for charity work and raising awareness for causes close to her heart. She spearheaded the annual Autism Bike Ride event, which unites law enforcement, first responders, and members of the community to "ride for a cause" in support of autism acceptance. Since its inception in 2018, the event has raised over \$70,000 for the University of Miami's Center for Autism and Related Disabilities (CARD) and Growing for Inclusion, two organizations dedicated to supporting families and individuals on the spectrum. In addition, with many of her friends and family impacted by lung disease, Ms. Harrington began working closely with the American Lung Association in 2015. Since then, she has raised over \$100,000 to support their mission and has been recognized nationally as the highest fundraising firefighter in both 2021 and 2025.

FIRST RESPONDERS

HECTOR GONZALEZ, JR.

Detective, Risk Protection Order Detail
City of Miami Police Department



"Det. Gonzalez has undoubtedly made a positive impact on the community he serves and continues to do so, demonstrating excellent initiative in assisting people to obtain mental health treatment; routinely identifying people with mental health illnesses that pose a threat to themselves or others, and serving them with Risk Protection Orders. He goes above and beyond to ensure that the community is safe."

Sgt. Surami Kelly
Police Sergeant
City of Miami Police Department

On March 18, 2025, Det. Hector Gonzalez self-initiated a case after learning that the previous day, Jeyson Antonio Calix Hernandez had made threats to shoot his family members, which included two children. Det. Gonzalez contacted Mr. Calix and encouraged him to receive mental health services and linked him with Thriving Mind of South Florida for health care coordination and medication management. After Mr. Calix was discharged from the hospital, he found himself homeless in the streets of Overtown, unable to go back home due to the threats he made to his family. He contacted Det. Gonzalez for help with housing assistance, and Det. Gonzalez was able to track down Mr. Calix in the Brickell area. With the help of Thriving Mind of South Florida, New Horizons, and Miami Jackson Behavioral Health, Det. Gonzalez was able to place him in care coordination and subsequently in an independent living facility. Det. Gonzalez then contacted Mr. Calix's mother in Honduras, and she pleaded for assistance to reunite them. Mr. Calix didn't possess any type of identification; therefore, he was not able to fly back home on his own. Det. Gonzalez contacted the Honduras consulate to mediate a feasible way to return Mr. Calix back to his home country to reunite with his mother. With the assistance of the Honduran Government, Mr. Calix was able to obtain a special permit and airfare which allowed him to fly back home. Det. Gonzalez then transported and escorted him to the airport terminal. Upon arrival in Honduras, Mr. Calix was greeted by government officials and paramedics to ensure he was physically and mentally stable. Mr. Calix is now back home with his mother and obtaining needed services. Det. Gonzalez's actions, diligence and passion resulted in the return of Mr. Calix to Honduras to reunify with his mother which supports a better quality of life.

Congratulations

to the 2026 Health Care Heroes Awards Honorees and Lifetime Achievement Award Recipient...

Carlos A. Migoya
CEO
Jackson Health System

His contributions to the success of Jackson Health are immeasurable.

Thank you to an extraordinary leader and businessman for his service, leadership and friendship to our entire South Florida community.

South Florida Hospital News and **HEALTHCARE REPORT**

THE REGION'S MONTHLY NEWSPAPER FOR HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS & PHYSICIANS

YOUTH VOLUNTEER RECIPIENT

AVERY MCCRAY
 Founder, Game Day Grannies
 Student, Robert Morgan
 Education Center



Determined, hard-working, outgoing, easygoing, generous, and well-respected are the first words that come to mind when describing Avery McCray. His commitment and involvement in school and community are remarkable, having accumulated over 1,800 service hours. Avery is the Founder of Game Day Grannies, a student-led organization dedicated to connecting high school students to senior citizens through sports and the arts. The program was designed to keep seniors alert and actively engaged while providing support to students. Together, they bond over activities and events.

Most recently, Avery has collaborated with Eatwell Exchange, Upright Spine Center and BGB Counseling to bring a free farmers' market to his neighborhood. Over 2,000 pounds of food was donated from Feeding America and distributed to over 85 families. This was a larger project that was inspired by his previous commitment to reduce and eliminate hunger by donating a percentage of the proceeds from his candle business.

For the past three summers, Avery volunteered for the nonprofit organization Breakthrough Miami. Most recently, he served as a teaching assistant where he was responsible for developing and delivering history lesson plans to fifth-grade students. He encouraged them to become involved in world matters and challenged them to make a difference, starting in their community. Also, during this time, Avery volunteered his photography skills to help the community, providing athletes with complimentary pictures and videos of their performances for college recruitment purposes.

Avery possesses a rare combination of tenacity, intensity, and strong interpersonal skills that make him stand out among his peers. Last year, he joined the school's choir elective and received the Top Junior Award. This same year, he also earned the Robert Morgan Educational Center Citizenship Award and was recognized by District 7 Miami-Dade County Public School Board member Mary Blanco. Currently, Avery is the SGA Social Media Chair, Miami Southridge Senior High Track and Field Captain, Mr. Top Teen (Southern Pearls Miami Dade Chapter) and 2025 Homecoming King.

"Avery approaches life with diligence, perseverance, and an unwavering commitment to personal, academic and athletic growth. He is a disciplined, passionate, and respectable young man."
 Avice Warren
 Supervisor
 Turbo and Trill Candle Company



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Congratulations

To our very own

2026 Healthcare Heroes Award Finalists



NURSE AWARD

Elizabeth Vieto-Smith, DNP, RN

Chief Nursing Officer,
University of Miami Health System



ORGANIZATION/PROGRAM AWARD

The Miami Project to Cure Paralysis
University of Miami Miller School of Medicine



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Proudly congratulates

Carlos A. Migoya

as the 2026 Recipient of the
**Equitable Advisors Lifetime
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His vision, selfless leadership
and outstanding career contributions
have been an example for us all.