

Emalee Flaherty, MD

The Ray E. Helfer Society Awards Dr. Emalee Flaherty Its Highest Honor



Emalee Flaherty, MD, retired, was presented with the 2017 Ray E. Helfer Award at the society's Annual Meeting in April at the Grand Hyatt in Denver, Colorado. The Helfer Society is an international society of physicians seeking to provide leadership to enhance the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of child abuse and neglect. The award is presented annually to a member in recognition of his or her distinguished contributions in the field.

Child maltreatment remains a topic that challenges the best and most committed pediatricians. Few deny the reality of child maltreatment. We are now a specialty, have a body of scientific literature, and a network of colleagues to assist us with challenging cases. In spite of all these resources this is difficult work. Now imagine being the medical director of a child protection team in 1978. Yes, there were other teams in this country, but there were very few and without the resources we all have come to rely upon. Our recipient of the Ray E. Helfer Society Award is a pioneer in the field of child maltreatment and a respected colleague who was there when few others were. Chicago and the State of Illinois has long had a leader in our field - Dr. Emalee Flaherty. Dr. Flaherty fought to draw attention to the issue of child abuse and neglect despite much institutional resistance. She persisted in the face of many obstacles to build diagnostic and treatment services for abused children in each of her positions over the years. Her career first focused on team building and clinical care. One must remember that in the 70's team work and the idea of collaboration, especially with individuals and agencies outside the discipline of medicine and the hospital, was uncommon. There were lots of obstacles to overcome. Child protection did not attract many doctors; the success of Dr. Flaherty's work was based on her ability to provide balanced, objective and compassionate care. She built a program where she was the go to doctor for child abuse, a program that once established, afforded her the opportunity to explore her academic interests, publish, lecture and train a new generation of child abuse pediatricians.

From 1978 to 1990 Emalee was the Director of the Child Protective Team at Columbus-Cabrini

Medical Center. In 1990 that team grew into Child Protection Center. In 1996 she became the Section Head of Child Abuse Pediatrics at Children's (Lurie) Memorial Hospital which she further developed into the Division of Child Abuse Pediatrics. She directed the Division until July 2015 when she turned over her fully developed program to a new generation of child abuse pediatricians. Very few child abuse programs have a trajectory of healthy development and when they do it's not because of happenstance. One need only look to the numerous state committees and task forces that Dr. Flaherty has been involved in that helped build the successful relationships and trust that she has developed with community partners.

They in turn invested in her programs, so important to the success of child protection in Illinois. It's not surprising that she has consistently received support from the State of Illinois, Department of Children and Family Services, Illinois Attorney General and the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority.

Dr. Flaherty is an engaging and thoughtful leader whose patience and persistence are hallmarks of her leadership style. She conducted clinical research on how primary care practitioners identify and manage children with injuries secondary to child abuse, examined circumstances around non-inflicted injuries to better understand inflicted injuries, studied the impact of childhood adverse experiences on children's health, and the personal consequences and challenges faced by child abuse pediatricians. To her credit, she has 47 peer reviewed (20 lead author) papers on a rich spectrum of issues related to our field, and served on numerous grant and editorial review boards. She has received research funding from the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, US-DHHS, Children's Justice Grant, National Center on Child Abuse & Neglect as well as significant and steady support from the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority-VOCA.

For four of the eight years Dr. Flaherty served on the AAP's Committee on Child Abuse and Neglect she chaired this important committee. She also served with distinction on the Academy's Section on Child Abuse & Neglect and in the Helfer Society in numerous capacities. She was the Society's representative to the AMA Advisory Council on Violence and Abuse.

Dr. Flaherty unquestionably has had an illustrious and visionary career and she has made an indelible mark on her community. Her accomplishments reflect a passionate concern for maltreated children and a commitment to their well-being. Most importantly, she is a kind and endearing colleague who has earned recognition for all that she has done for children and how she has enriched the Helfer Society. Recently, Dr. Flaherty reached another milestone and was awarded recognition by her respectful institution, Professor Emeritus.

