

Lenora Colaruotolo, LMSW, Wins URMC Excellence Award

Lenora Colaruotolo's title is Senior Social Worker, but she takes on many different jobs: educator, pioneer, advocate, mentor, diplomat, and fundraiser.

Anyone who knows her will say she's easy to talk to and quickly earns your trust and confidence—and that she's compassionate, resourceful, dedicated, insightful, professional, and *very persistent*.

“She just doesn't give up,” said URMC's chief social worker, Mardy Sandler. “She knows what's right for the patient and tenaciously pursues it.”



One recent example was a 4-year old boy with severe decay on more than half his teeth, several of which were decayed into the nerve of the tooth, causing pain and infection, and making it difficult to chew. Denied twice by insurance for treatment in the operating room, Lenora stepped in to facilitate an appeal, and for months, worked closely with the boy's family, EIOH pediatric dentists, his pediatrician, day care providers, the URMC medical director, legal counsel and even the New York State Attorney General's office. Lenora simultaneously researched other options to cover this child's treatment in case the appeal was also denied. But her persistence paid off. The appeal was approved, and the child was treated successfully. Today he is a thriving, healthy youngster.

For the last eight years, Lenora has worked diligently to help countless kids like him and to improve the oral health of our area's low income residents. Because she understands the detrimental effects of untreated dental disease, she is passionate about developing innovative approaches to ensure that patients have access to preventive dental care, while at the same time educating patients and providers about the importance of prevention and eliminating barriers to care.

“Lenora epitomizes the values that have shaped our mission and our community service since George Eastman established Eastman Dental almost 100 years ago,” said Cyril Meyerowitz, DDS, director of Eastman Institute for Oral Health. “Lenora consistently demonstrates how social work has become a valuable asset to the services we provide.”

“Lenora has made significant contributions to the Pediatric Dentistry Division,” said Robert J. Berkowitz, DDS, professor and chair, Pediatric Dentistry, EIOH. “Her educational programs and case consults for the residents, staff and faculty concerning child abuse, child neglect and

domestic violence has substantially raised the division's level of the awareness, sensitivity, and response to these issues.”

“Her manner with patients is so caring and compassionate that she has successfully revealed information that other clinicians rarely uncover,” added David Levy, DDS, faculty member in Pediatric Dentistry and EIOH chief quality officer and medical director. “Her skills in this area have helped faculty and residents understand and appreciate patients and their circumstances in a wider social context.”

Lenora is an integral part of the craniofacial team, and treats patients like family. Patients with craniofacial disorders oftentimes require several surgeries from infancy through adulthood, so her interaction with them spans many years.

“Lenora is a compassionate supporter of our patients and their families as they navigate the complex health care environment and seek multidisciplinary care,” said John Giroto, MD, director of the Golisano Children's Hospital Cleft and Craniofacial Anomalies Center. “For patients, finding the financial and support resources can be difficult across many government and local agencies. Whether it is the contact information for home nursing support, respite care for a stressed family, or the money to buy a patient Christmas presents, Lenora strives to ensure that no child has to ‘go it alone.’”

Jeffrey Karp, DMD, program director for Pediatric Dentistry, couldn't agree more. “Her experience, work ethic, and commitment to advocacy for our patients allow us to provide interdisciplinary services despite numerous barriers to care in many situations. “After realizing that the unmet needs of dental patients prevented them from getting care, Lenora was among those who established Sponsor- a -Smile, an ongoing hardship fund that to date has raised more than \$9,000. The funds help pay for dental expenses that insurance doesn't cover, fill prescriptions, and help with transportation costs. Sponsor-a-Smile also contributes to improving the overall dental experience, enhance socialization and literacy for young patients through purchasing play equipment, age appropriate reading material and music to reduce anxiety during procedures.

“Even with limited time, Lenora believes it's important to invest in the future, and always mentors a social worker intern, helps students with their research projects and provides great training for our future social workers,” added Sandler. She's also seen year-round at health fairs to help educate patients and parents of at-risk children.

Lenora has become involved in quality of life dental issues for patients who have finished their cancer treatment, like 33-year old Marguerite Guido, who was in frail health, experiencing much pain, was new to town and had few resources.

“Words cannot capture what is in my heart about Lenora,” Guido said. “Lenora is a woman whose genuine love for people is seen in all that she does. Her knowledge, professionalism, and compassion are beyond anything I can describe...to me and my family she has been a true blessing.”

