



NEWS RELEASE

October 16, 2019

Illinois Colorectal Cancer Fighters Receive Recognition

St. Louis, Missouri, Wednesday, October 16, 2019. The Hope Light Foundation Presented “Hope Light Awards for Excellence in the Fight Against Cancer” to recognize four individuals who have been leaders in bringing the fight against colorectal cancer to rural Illinois communities. Three of the awardees are from the University of Chicago Medicine Centers for Asian Health Equity (CAHE), i.e., Fornessa Randal, Executive Director, Manasi Jayaprakash, Program Operations Director and Emily Koebnick, Program Manager. The other awardee is Rhonda Andrews-Ray, Executive Director/Public Health Administrator at the Southern Seven Health Department in Ullin, Illinois.

Fornessa Randal was instrumental in initiating a working relationship with The Hope Light Foundation to expand the CDC funded Cook County CARES (Colorectal Cancer Alliance to Reinforce and Enhance Screening) into rural Illinois communities. Together they implemented and funded FluFIT programs in counties throughout the state that were targeted due to their being high risk for colorectal cancer. FluFIT is an award-winning and research-tested program that helps health care teams increase colorectal cancer screening rates by offering fecal immunochemical tests (FIT) to eligible patients during annual flu shot campaigns. Manasi Jayaprakash and Emily Koebnick were leaders in implementing and sustaining the successful FluFIT program in targeted rural Illinois health departments. They also hosted Project ECHO (Extension for Community Healthcare Outcomes) video conferences with FluFIT program participants to address challenges, share and learn implementation strategies, and increase CRC screening rates.

Rhonda Andrews-Ray has been a major colorectal cancer screening supporter and active participant in FIT kit distribution and processing for more than four years as both the Administrator of the Fayette County Health Department and more recently as Administrator of the Southern Seven Health Department. While at Fayette County Health Department, Rhonda implemented a highly successful colorectal cancer screening program and worked with surrounding county health departments to help train health care workers in processing FIT kits and coordinating the results with patients and family physicians.

Awardees were selected due to their excellent efforts in promoting colorectal cancer screening in high risk for colorectal cancer rural communities and their demonstrated dedication to working with local health department employees in distributing and processing FIT kits. Their contributions to the fight against colorectal cancer in rural Illinois will have a significant impact on increasing early detection and on decreasing the burden of this deadly disease.

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The attached photo is available for media use. Pictured are: Rudy Bess-Hope Light Foundation Director presenting awards to: (Clockwise from Upper Left) Fornessa Randal-University of Chicago Medicine, Manasi Jayaprakash-University of Chicago Medicine, Rhonda Andrews-Ray, Southern Seven Health Department. Not present; Emily Koebnick-University of Chicago Medicine.

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