

# 2012 Power To Change Our World

## Jeffrey S. Geller, MD

Family Physicians have a long tradition of leadership in the communities in which they live and work. In addition to caring for patients and families in the office and hospital, they are involved on the local, state, national and international scene. Family Physicians play a special role in promoting the health and well-being of our world.

The Family Medicine Education Consortium, Inc. seeks to identify and recognize Family Physicians who have developed innovative projects and programs that have had a positive impact on the world.

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### Review Committee

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Dr. Geller's years of innovative work on patient empowerment for people living in the most socioeconomically disadvantaged city in Massachusetts has transcended simply addressing their biomedical needs. Dr. Geller is an extraordinary example of a physician taking a new idea to meet a need and despite many obstacles turning it into not only a healthcare program but an actual social movement. Dr. Geller is a practicing full-scope family physician and part-time educator of family medicine residents and medical students whose ideas were "ahead of their time" but are now being implemented nationally as part of the Patient Centered Medical Home model. His efforts to reduce pediatric obesity were recognized in 2008 by the Surgeon General of the United States and also by a Certificate of Special Congressional Recognition.

Dr. Geller's work in pioneering the concept of group visits has been a model used by others far from Lawrence. He decided in 1996 to start dealing directly with social and societal issues as a family physician by implementing a patient-centered, patient empowerment focused, non-pharmaceutical-centric treatment approach to providing healthcare to those that are among the most disempowered in our society. The son of working class parents, Dr. Geller has made serving a Spanish-speaking immigrant population his life's work, but not in a typical way. He started a first-of-its-kind integrative medicine fellowship for family physicians to specifically serve an underserved community and started a group visit model program that has grown to be one of the largest in the United States. Integrative medicine modalities and group visits were of particular value to this patient population who could not afford medications yet had strong cultural bonds within the community, leading Dr. Geller to develop a group visit framework. Through his insights he diagnosed our community and our patients' leading obstacle to good health outcomes and then prescribed empowerment and self-efficacy for them.

Currently Dr. Geller's program has over 30 different family physician-led groups that meet each week. In addition there are 14 non-physician led (mainly exercise and yoga) groups that are meeting weekly. Each group has about 10 to 25 participants amounting to over 400 participants using the services each week. Dr. Geller's group visit program serves over 1,500 different people annually. With a significant pediatric obesity problem owing to poverty, a lack of adequate nutritional resources in the public schools, the traditional cultural dietary choices of our patient population, and other factors, Dr. Geller's pediatric obesity group visit and school-based programs serve over 400 children in Lawrence.

Financial resources are often seen as an insurmountable barrier to creating new programs and effecting change. Dr. Geller successfully advocated with payors to create billing codes that now cover 80% of his program's costs, and has received additional grants from New Balance (a local company) and other funders to make his programs self-sustainable. His fundraising has been in a very grass-roots style, personally making appointments with decision-makers and advocating directly so that his ideas come to life.

Jeff Geller, MD is an inspiration to family physicians, residents, and medical students as well as his patients and his community. He has created and grown programs that no one else either thought of doing or had the will to make it happen. He is a person who embodies the philosophy and spirit of both the FMEC and its "Power to Change Our World" Award, inspiring those in family medicine to understand that they indeed have the power to change our world.

Nominated by: **Joseph W. Gravel, Jr., MD**, Program Director, Lawrence Family Medicine Residency  
Chief Medical Officer, Greater Lawrence Family Health Center, Lawrence, MA