

Credentialing Resource Center Journal

Profile: 2017 CRC Medical Staff Leader of the Year

The 2017 CRC Medical Staff Leader of the Year is...

James J. Fitzgibbon, MD, FAAP
Akron (Ohio) Children's Hospital

*Editor's note: This profile is part of the special 2017 CRC contest coverage, a collaboration between **Credentialing Resource Center Journal**, **Medical Staff Briefing**, and **Credentialing Resource Center Daily**. Check back in throughout [Winners' Week](#) to learn more about this year's CRC Achievement Awards and CRC Symposium Case Study Competition winners.*

When talking about his decision to take on various medical staff leadership roles, **James J. Fitzgibbon, MD, FAAP**, says it was simply expected of all of medical staff members as part of their citizenship. However, Fitzgibbon's long, rich history as a medical staff leader at Akron (Ohio) Children's Hospital indicates that he goes well above just "doing his part."

"Dr. Fitzgibbon walks the walk," says **Terri Frishgesell, CPCS**, lead medical staff coordinator and credentialing specialist at Akron Children's Hospital. "He is an excellent role model, and he encourages other physicians through his example of steadfast dedication and humble service."

"He knows when to demand action from colleagues and how to facilitate sensitive discussion. He is compassionate and fair, and does not miss an opportunity to deliver praise and positive feedback," says **Katherine Glaros**, credentialing specialist at Akron Children's Hospital.

This accessible leadership style inspired Frishgesell and her medical staff services colleagues to nominate Fitzgibbon for the 2017 CRC Medical Staff Leader of the Year award—and compelled an eight-person expert selection panel to name him the winner.

"Dr. Fitzgibbon followed his service as president of the medical staff by serving as chair of the credentials committee for 11 years. His visionary leadership has placed him in the forefront on many credentialing and privileging issues, including the introduction of medical staff membership to advanced practice professionals and initiating the practitioner clinical review process," says **Carol Cairns, CPMSM, CPCS**, member of the selection panel, president of PRO-CON, and advisory consultant for The Greeley Company. "In my opinion, there can be no greater honor than that of one's peer group. Dr. Fitzgibbon's many prestigious awards for his clinical, teaching, and medico-administrative contributions demonstrate that his peer group holds him in the highest regard."

And these contributions extend well beyond the walls of Akron Children's Hospital. Fitzgibbon is known in his community for his dedication to adolescents. He assisted in the establishment of Akron Children's Hospital's division of adolescent medicine and has served as the division director since 1980. He is also the medical director of the County of Summit Juvenile Detention Center. Since 1980, the detention center has benefitted from his commitment to care for incarcerated teens in Summit County.

In recognition of these wide-ranging services, Fitzgibbon has won numerous honors over the years, including the American Academy of Pediatrics Founder's of Adolescent Medicine Award, the Akron Children's Hospital Department of Pediatrics Legendary Service Award, the American Academy of Pediatrics (Ohio Chapter) Committee Chair of the Year, and the Shelter Care Professional Recognition Award.

Building a more inclusive medical staff

Fitzgibbon will accept his latest accolade, the Medical Staff Leader of the Year award, at the 2017 CRC Symposium, set for April 6–7 in Austin, Texas. The distinction honors Fitzgibbon's work in advancing the credentialing, privileging, and peer review processes at Akron Children's Hospital. Fitzgibbon started as secretary/treasurer of the medical staff, then worked his way up to president. He recently handed over the credentials committee reins after serving as chair since 2005.

During his tenure as credentials committee chair, Fitzgibbon helped advanced practice professionals (APP) become active members of the medical staff. This work involved:

- Creating privilege delineation forms for APPs
- Assembling an APP credentials subcommittee that provides recommendations to the credentials committee on APP applicants
- Giving APPs representation on the credentials committee and medical executive committee

Fitzgibbon says the current challenge is deciding which healthcare providers should *not* be on the medical staff.

“When is allied health just allied health? I don’t know the answer to that because everyone is expanding their field. But the fact that [Akron Children’s Hospital] has been doing it for so long, I think we have great tools to work through it,” he says.

Another advancement that Fitzgibbon is proud of is developing a physician reentry model. “We had some very bright folks who left practice for a while and wanted to come back. Without having to send them back to school for a year, we came up with some nice internal processes to get folks reentered. That was rewarding.”

Fitzgibbon is quick to commend the medical staff services department (MSSD) for its extensive contributions to both efforts, which included keeping Fitzgibbon up to speed on regulatory and administrative changes.

For their part, the MSSD staff hold Fitzgibbon in similarly high esteem. He is considered a “great teacher” who uses his experience and knowledge of credentialing to help the MSSD advance the credentialing process.

“He appreciates the work that comes from the medical staff services department. His daily interactions and sense of duty to the medical staff services staff is very supportive,” says Glaros.

Becoming a medical staff leader

Fitzgibbon admits that he is from the generation of physicians who did not have a great work-life balance, so taking on various medical staff leadership roles was not a big deal. Now, as the younger generation of physicians strive for more balance in their lives, it can be challenging for hospitals to find new volunteers for leadership positions. However, more physicians also want to be employed, which Fitzgibbon sees as an opportunity.

“Part of their employment should be administration of medicine. I firmly believe that you have to have physicians engaged in their own organization of how they practice. An administrator who has an MBA in hospital medicine cannot really decide a physician’s scope of practice or credentials.”

He also suggests that medical staffs find a way to make the governance processes less cumbersome and more streamlined. He credits his medical staff with doing this by creating a flow between credentialing, privileging, quality, peer review, and risk management. “Too many people want to know the same thing. So you have to put it all together. That is how you get your credentials committee to work and still have time for clinical duties.”

Although physician burnout is on the rise, and attributed to the many responsibilities physicians now have, Fitzgibbon says taking on leadership roles actually prevented him from burning out.

“Sometimes when you are in practice, it is easy to lose track of everything except what is right there in front of you. I enjoyed learning about everyone else’s roles and training and difficulties and skills; talking to open-heart surgeons about their stresses or how they get things done, that interaction has been rewarding. You get it in medical school, but then kind of lose it in residency because you are only with your specialty.

“You also get an appreciation for administration—getting used to different opinions and limitations and finding different ways of solving problems. Physicians are good at solving problems; that is what we do. It was fun to take our problem solving skills and mesh that with administration.”

About the 2017 CRC Contests

The 2017 CRC Symposium Case Study Competition and the 2017 CRC Achievement Awards are two inaugural contests recognizing MSPs and medical staff leaders who have made exceptional strides in their organization and the broader professional community. Winners, who were selected by a panel of esteemed industry experts, will be honored at the 2017 CRC Symposium, held April 6–7 in Austin, Texas.

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