



GENERATIONS + NORTHERN MANHATTAN HEALTH NETWORK

PRESS RELEASE

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LINCOLN HOSPITAL HEALTH LITERACY ACTIVIST MARIA RAMOS ONE OF TEN AMERICANS CHOSEN TO RECEIVE \$125,000 NATIONAL AWARD FOR IMPROVING LOCAL HEALTH CONDITIONS

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Presented Ramos with the 2008 Community Health Leaders Award for Creating a Program that Provides Free Health Screenings for Disadvantaged New York City Taxi Drivers

Lincoln Medical and Mental Health Center is proud to announce that Maria Ramos, a longtime health literacy activist in New York City's impoverished South Bronx, East Harlem and Central Harlem communities, is one of ten exemplary Americans who received the Community Health Leaders Award for 2008, presented by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Ms. Ramos, Director of Lincoln Hospital's Community Health Education and Outreach, was selected from more than 800 nominations submitted from across the United States.

The distinguished annual award honors extraordinary men and women from all over the country who conquer huge obstacles and take commanding action in local communities to tackle some of the most challenging health care problems facing the nation. Awardees are celebrated with national recognition and \$125,000.

The Foundation chose Ramos this year for her leadership in developing an initiative to provide free health screenings for hundreds of taxi and limousine drivers in the South Bronx and East Harlem communities served by Lincoln Medical and Mental Health Center of the New York City Health and Hospitals Corporation. Ramos was presented with her award on October 29 at a special ceremony honoring each of the 2008 recipients in San Diego.

"Maria Ramos' commitment to her community drives her out-of-the-box thinking that all communities need to adapt to meet constantly evolving challenges," said Janice Ford Griffin, national program director for the award. "Maria is tenacious in her efforts to figure out what will work and how to make it happen."

"Reaching communities that are challenged by high disease prevalence, and providing improved access to health information, preventive screening and patient navigation, are consistent with the New York City Health and Hospitals Corporation's solid commitment to serve as the health care safety net for the city's poorest, least enfranchised residents," said Lincoln Hospital Executive Director Jose R. Sanchez. "Through Maria Ramos' ingenuity and initiative, we are partnering with community-based organizations to heighten public awareness of significant healthcare issues specific to the community; thereby decreasing the pervasiveness of preventable diseases."

Through the Taxi/Limousine Drivers' Health Initiative, Ramos deploys staff members to 70 taxi bases daily to deliver crucial health services to hundreds of drivers. Using dispatch radios, announcements are made to inform drivers about the dates and locations where medical services will be provided. Ms. Ramos' team conduct health screenings, including glucose, blood pressure and prostate, breast and colon cancer; administer flu shots; schedule medical appointments and assist drivers with enrolling in health insurance plans. They also educate drivers about chronic illnesses such as asthma, cancer and heart disease. In an effort to limit drivers' time off the road, Ramos' "express care" system delivers all services within an hour.

“Our goal is to address the health care needs of a population that suffers from the characteristic fears of the impoverished and disenfranchised,” said Ms. Ramos. “Many are frustrated with language and communication barriers, lack of insurance and fears that their immigration status will prevent them from getting much needed medical treatment or preventative screenings. Others are just too busy driving their taxis for long hours in order to make enough money to feed their families and pay the bills.”

Ms. Ramos notes that these are individuals at high risk of contracting preventable illnesses that if left untreated, could result in chronic conditions and/or poor outcomes. . Many taxi drivers suffer from poor circulation and other medical conditions resulting from the sedentary nature of their work and poor eating habits that can lead to obesity and diabetes.

More than 4,000 drivers have been reached through Ms. Ramos' program. Drivers served are predominantly Dominican, West African, Colombian and Venezuelan male immigrants between the ages of 21 and 60. Most are uninsured.

The Foundation's \$125,000 award consists of \$20,000 personal gift to awardees and \$105,000 to support their work. Addressing ways in which this grant will be utilized, Ms. Ramos stated, “I am personally committed to do my part to eliminate disparities in health among the communities I serve. This grant will greatly enhance our ability to continue to reach out to populations that are confronting obstacles in accessing health care. After a careful assessment of needs, the monies will be appropriately allocated to expand life-saving screenings that provide early intervention of disease to help eradicate health disparities.”

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