the schwartz center
FOR COMPASSIONATE HEALTHCARE

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UMass Memorial Physician Receives 2012 Compassionate Caregiver Award
Award recognizes healthcare providers who display extraordinary compassion for patients

Boston, MA (November 12, 2012) – The Schwartz Center for Compassionate Healthcare, a nationwide nonprofit organization dedicated to strengthening the relationship between patients and their healthcare providers, has announced that John Zawacki, MD, a gastroenterologist at UMass Memorial Medical Center in Worcester, Massachusetts, has received the 2012 Schwartz Center Compassionate Caregiver Award.

The award was established in 1999 to honor healthcare providers who display extraordinary compassion in caring for patients and families. The recipient is chosen by a review committee based on how well he or she embodies the characteristics of compassionate care, including effective communication, emotional support, mutual trust and respect, involving patients and families in healthcare decisions, and treating patients as people, not just illnesses.

Dr. Zawacki was honored at the 17th Annual Kenneth B. Schwartz Compassionate Healthcare Dinner at the Boston Convention Center on November 9th before an audience of nearly 2,000 caregivers, patients and families. He also received a cash prize of $5,000.

Dr. Zawacki grew up on the campus of Taunton State Hospital, a mental health institution where he learned compassion from his father, a psychiatrist, who was responsible for treating the hospital's 1,500 residents. "It was my father," he says, "who taught me more than any other person in my lifetime what it means to be a physician."

After graduating from Tufts Medical School as chief resident, Dr. Zawacki was offered a teaching position in Boston but chose to go to Worcester instead. For more than 30 years, he has cared for patients with Crohn's disease, colitis and inflammatory bowel disease, a difficult and painful condition that is sometimes associated with trauma and abuse.

His ability to understand both the psychosocial and clinical aspects of care is evident in his many letters from patients. Said one, "I have come to know and completely trust Dr. Zawacki as a healer without equal. He is a compassionate man who gives tirelessly of himself and is an optimist for both of us even when all options conventional and clinical have been exhausted."

Said another, "What I have enjoyed most about my relationship with Dr. Zawacki is that he sees me as a partner and not just a patient. He listens not only to my concerns but also my ideas and is willing to trust my judgment. I have never felt rushed in a visit with him, and he knows me as a person as well as a patient."

In addition to his close relationships with patients, Dr. Zawacki has taught and mentored hundreds of medical students, residents and GI fellows. He often tells them, "As long as you share your feelings and have good intentions, the words will come. It [being a doctor] is not a scripted experience."

In his dinner remarks, Dr. Zawacki credited his colleagues with nurturing compassion in him. "I believe compassion is a gift, which like the seed in the parable of the sower can fall on a variety of soils which can be variably nurtured and produce 10, 20 or 100 fold," he said. "I have been nurtured by many people throughout my life. Among them nurses, nursing assistants, technicians, secretaries and custodians who model compassionate care for anyone with eyes to see and ears to hear."

He also thanked his father. "It all began with my dad, who modeled for me what it means to be a compassionate caregiver on a daily basis. As a child, I was taught to say 'good night' to the patients waiting in our hallway. When I asked Dad why people needed a psychiatrist, he said: 'John, everyone needs a caring listener sometime in their lives.'"

In addition to Dr. Zawacki, four other award finalists were also honored for their compassion: Konstantin Dragnev, MD, of Dartmouth-Hitchcock's Norris Cotton Cancer Center in Lebanon, New Hampshire; Mary Harris, RN, CRRN, of Yale-New Haven Hospital in Connecticut; Kimberly Kelley, RN, MSN, of MetroWest Medical Center in Framingham, Massachusetts; and Mark Puder, MD, PhD, of Boston Children's Hospital.

The 2012 Schwartz Center Compassionate Caregiver Award is made possible through the generous support of Genzyme, a Sanofi company, and Sanofi Oncology.

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About the Schwartz Center

The Schwartz Center for Compassionate Healthcare (www.theschwartzcenter.org) is a nationwide nonprofit organization dedicated to strengthening the relationship between patients and caregivers. The Center reflects the vision of Ken Schwartz, who died of lung cancer at the age of 40 and found that what mattered most to him as a patient was the compassionate care he received from his caregivers. He founded the Schwartz Center in 1995 just days before his death to ensure that all patients receive compassionate care. The Center's signature program is Schwartz Center Rounds, which allow caregivers from multiple disciplines to come together on a regular basis to discuss the most challenging emotional and social issues they face in caring for patients. The program has been adopted by hundreds of healthcare institutions in the U.S. and U.K. and has been shown to enhance compassion, improve teamwork, and reduce caregiver stress. It has also led to the adoption of more patient-centered practices and policies in many healthcare institutions.