

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON  
**MEDICAL CENTER**  
UW Medicine

## May 2009 Medical Staff Teamwork Leadership Caring Award

Corinne Fligner, M.D.

Associate Professor, UW Medicine Pathology

Adjunct Associate Professor, Laboratory Medicine

Director, UWMC Autopsy and After Death Services

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Dr. Fligner was nominated by colleagues who stated:

“A UWMC patient recently underwent a successful organ transplant. Following the surgery, the patient requested to have the explanted organ returned for burial according to spiritual and religious practices and traditions. In usual circumstances, the policies and procedures of University of Washington Medical Center (UWMC) prohibit the release of formalin fixed human tissue and organ specimens, except to a licensed funeral home or cemetery for the purposes of storage or burial/cremation, since formaldehyde is a chemical with potential hazards.

Nonetheless, Dr. Fligner recognizes the importance of patient centered care and of respect for cultural and religious traditions. We wish to acknowledge the time and effort expended by Dr. Corinne Fligner and her associate, Ms. Jessica Norberg of Decedent Affairs, to develop a special release form and to communicate effectively with the patient and with the patient’s religious counselor to inform them of the potential issues related to tissue release, and to ensure that we could transfer to organ to them in a way that both respected the religious needs of the patient and that would lead to no hazardous exposure for the patient or his community. The time and effort that Dr. Fligner spent exemplifies her commitment both to patient centered care, and to the need for sensitivity to cultural differences and traditions.

As noted, Dr. Corinne Fligner took the time to review the details of this particular request with the patient and the patient’s family, with the patient’s religious counselor, and with representatives from Risk Management, UWMC Anatomic Pathology, and UWMC Administration, and to develop a modification of our policy as well as a tissue release form for use in such unusual and special circumstances. This special request form and procedural language that Dr. Fligner developed will be used as a foundation for similar future patient needs.



Pictured with Dr. Fligner are Dr. Thomas Hei, UWMC Associate Medical Director for Ambulatory Services, and Stephen Zieniewicz, UWMC Executive Director

Dr. Fligner eventually accompanied the patient to receive the organ. Dr. Fligner took the extra efforts to ensure personally that the process went smoothly, to follow through from developing the procedure to informing the patient of the issues involved, and to answer the patient’s questions. Dr. Fligner’s sensitivity and diligence in meeting this patient’s particular needs are notable as an instance in which UWMC physicians help to build trust of patients and their communities in all aspects of the care that we provide.”

If you would like to learn more about the UWMC Employee Recognition Program or would like to submit a nomination for one the awards sponsored by UWMC Organization Development and Training, please visit their website (<http://odt.uwmc.washington.edu/recognition/index.html>) or contact their office at 598-6118.