



Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

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## **Minnesota Resident Honored for Creating a New Model of Care for Dementia Sufferers**

*Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to Present Judy Berry  
With a 2010 Community Health Leaders Award*

**PRINCETON, N.J.**—Judy Berry was starting the day at her new job when she got a phone call that changed her life. Her mother, Evelyn, had been hospitalized after accidentally overdosing on her medications. Berry was told her mother could no longer live alone. Berry, who was recently divorced with very little money, knew that meant she would have to break a lifelong promise to her mother. She had to put Evelyn in a nursing home.

During the first week, Evelyn took a walk outside. When the nursing home staff was unable to find her, they called her walk an “escape,” and Evelyn was thereafter considered to have a “behavior problem,” according to Berry. She was placed in a small, locked dementia unit. For Berry, that began a “seven-year horror story” that involved dozens of different nursing homes, hospitalizations, drug-induced rages, battles with nursing home staff members and lots of tears. Throughout the ordeal, Berry fought for a more humane approach to her mother’s care, but, she said, “The system wouldn’t allow it. The system had made up its mind that she was no longer there, and that the solution was to ‘medicate her into oblivion’ to make her compliant in her environment.”

After her mother died, Berry’s anger and frustration turned to motivation to provide a different approach to caring for people with dementia. She decided that with her own funds, she would provide an alternative to those who needed dementia care in her home town of Darwin, Minn. “I thought, ‘You can sit and complain about something not being right, or you can do something about it.’” Berry, however, did not have a background in health care. Encouraged by her employer to follow her dream, she started visiting nursing homes around the country. “I didn’t bother talking to the administrators. I knew they would just think I was crazy. I talked to the frontline staff and asked them what worked and what didn’t. I found they often agreed with my gut feeling that my mother’s behavior was the result of unmet emotional needs,” said Berry, whose facility in Darwin is called Lakeview Ranch.

For her courage to create a new model of care for those suffering from dementia—and for never turning someone away because of an inability to pay—Berry has been named one of 10 recipients of the *Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Community Health Leaders Award*, which honors exceptional men and women who have overcome

significant obstacles to tackle some of the most challenging health and health care problems facing their communities. Berry will receive the award during a ceremony at the Foundation in Princeton, N.J., on August 12.

Berry's road to Lakeview Ranch was fraught with obstacles. Having no assets, she struggled to get a loan, until she met a banker whose mother had had the same experience as Berry's. Even after securing the loan, she was sued by her neighbors, who feared that the presence of an elder care facility on their street would lower their property values.

*Community Health Leaders* National Program Director Janice Ford Griffin said that Berry has demonstrated courage and commitment to persevere in the development of new techniques that reflect sensitivity, compassion and a willingness to address the complex nature of dementia as it affects each patient.

Berry said her model of care works because "we treat dementia sufferers like human beings." Addressing the residents' spiritual and emotional needs is a key component of the care delivered at the facility. Staffers are trained to monitor and respond to the residents' emotional issues such as anxiety, fear and depression. This model of care creates an environment that allows all its residents to maintain their dignity, choice and the best possible quality of life, Berry said.

Berry notes, though, that this care requires a high staff-to-resident ratio and for registered nurses to address any other concurrent medical conditions a resident might have. In this way, staff has the support necessary to proactively manage residents' dementia and other medical conditions and avoid the trauma and expense of hospital emergency room visits. For this kind of staffing, "Medicaid only pays one third of what is needed," Berry said. So she set up a foundation to help cover the rest. With the economic downturn, however, donations to the Dementia Care Foundation are down 60 percent.

"I invite people to come and see our model of care," said Berry. In a recent study of the Lakeview Ranch Model of Specialized Dementia Care,<sup>®</sup> Berry's approach was found to reduce hospitalizations by 93 percent, she said. "Our residents all had had multiple hospitalizations before they came to us. We reduce that by really getting to know our residents and by meeting the underlying needs causing the behavior. Our staff is incredible," Berry said.

Stacy L. Nichols, M.D., a board-certified adult and geriatric psychiatrist at Hutchinson Area Health Care in Hutchinson, Minn., said that Berry's facility provides its residents with a caring, home-like environment. "Judy has provided a home environment that any one of us would want our family members to be in if they had the need. I have had the opportunity to speak at her facility and assist in educating her staff. I told them my hope was that I could be on the waiting list for a room when that time comes. It is the highest compliment I can pay her and her staff," Nichols said.

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation has honored more than 180 *Community Health Leaders* since 1993. The work of the nine other 2010 recipients includes a worker-owned collaborative that provides healthy food to a disenfranchised community in Oakland, Calif.; health and social services for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender

(LGBT) youth in Chicago; medical care for women who are homeless in Boston; a health promotion program for Hispanics in Central Florida; a disease management program for women living with HIV/AIDS in New York City; services for brain injury patients in Southwest Virginia; medical care and transition assistance for former prison inmates in San Francisco; oral health care for homeless people in Phoenix; and a community clinic for low-income and uninsured patients in Albuquerque, N.M.

Nominations can be submitted through late October for the 2011 *Community Health Leaders Award*. For details on how to submit a nomination, including eligibility requirements and selection criteria, visit [www.communityhealthleaders.org](http://www.communityhealthleaders.org).

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*The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation established the Community Health Leaders Award to recognize individuals who overcome daunting obstacles to improve health and health care in their communities. Today, there are 183 outstanding Community Health Leaders from nearly all states, Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia. For more information, visit [www.communityhealthleaders.org](http://www.communityhealthleaders.org).*

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