

Parker J. Palmer Courage to Teach Award
for Program Director Excellence



The Parker J. Palmer Courage to Teach Award honors program directors who find innovative ways to teach residents/fellows and to provide quality health care while remaining connected to the initial impulse to care for others in this environment. The ACGME congratulates the 2017 recipients of the Courage to Teach Award.



Richard J. Pels, MD
Program Director for Internal Medicine
Cambridge Health Alliance
Cambridge, MA

Nominators had this to say:

“Five years ago, Dr. Pels led our program's innovative transformation from weekly continuity clinics to a ‘4+2’ ambulatory immersion schedule. Recognizing that the traditional structure of internal medicine residency often pushes primary care training to the sidelines, he led a complete overhaul of the program to devote a third of total training time to protected ambulatory blocks spread across the three years. This helps residents to envision life as primary care physicians,

to connect with multidisciplinary care teams at their clinics, and preliminarily seems to have boosted the number of graduates going into primary care.

“Dr. Pels is our residency program's north star: an ever-present guide who does not draw attention to himself but without whom it would be impossible to chart a course. A primary care physician for 30 years and a program director for the past 22, he stood by the mission of providing academically rigorous training for generalists at a safety-net hospital through periods when this aim was fairly unpopular. Now that primary care is widely accepted as the foundation of our healthcare system, Dr. Pels' steadfast commitment to this mission has elevated the program to even greater heights.”

“In the last several years, Dr. Pels shepherded the Internal Medicine Residency Program through a redesign that has emphasized and reinvigorated primary care training for the current era. The trainees participate in practice transformation aligned with the Patient Centered Medical Home concept. His program prepares a new generation of internists for multifaceted roles as clinicians, innovators, and agents of change working on behalf of patients and communities in the most need.”