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Health Care Heroes: Dr. Barbara Freeman, honoree, manager category

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JANET ADAMS

Dr. Barbara Freeman.

**Dr. Barbara Freeman, chief medical and quality officer,
InHealth Mutual**

Dr. Barbara Freeman is on a mission to put medicine back in the driver's seat when it comes to caring for patients.

Her lifetime focus is on creating medical programs "tailored to meet the needs of a specific population and access level and to the providers who are there.

"We are taking the practice of medicine back to where it used to be," Freeman said. "I remember my dad knew as much about what was personally going on in the lives of his patients than perhaps they themselves understood."

Freeman's exposure to the doctor-patient relationship began at age 5 as she joined her father, Dr. Wanless Mann, on visits with patients in rural Kentucky. Those experiences taught her the importance of practicing medicine with heart.

After medical school, she worked with her father for 12 years. She became a champion of the uninsured. Encouraged by the Affordable Care Act of 2010, Freeman helped launch InHealth Mutual as Ohio's only health insurance co-op in 2012.

“She was the vision, drive and ‘feet on the ground,’” wrote Dr. Mike Stinziano, an InHealth Mutual board member.

Nonprofit InHealth is one of 22 U.S. health insurance co-ops.

Using a model that didn't previously exist, Freeman secured the co-op certification from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services and a license from the Ohio Department of Insurance.

“There is no more effective administrator than one who has a vision and brings it to life by inspiring everyone from employees to board members to vendors to community partners to get on board and support that vision – especially a vision that is new and unproven,” Stinziano wrote.

Freeman frequently is in the field, meeting with physicians, vendors and patients. She uses that information to craft programs like the Health Smart Checklist used to assess member needs and connect them to services. The program covers two visits to the primary care physician and two visits to a behavioral health specialist – beyond what insurance companies typically include.

When Freeman hears about members who don't get medicine because of unaffordable deductibles or missed deadlines, she steps in. She has been known to remove the deductible, reinstate coverage and approve free services.

“We want to eliminate barriers to prevention and wellness,” Freeman said. “We are not trying to reinvent the wheel. We want to take it back to the basics.”