



Humanitarian Award

Marilyn Fabbri, MD '96

For more than three decades, Marilyn Fabbri, MD '96, has dedicated her career to caring for society's most vulnerable patients. An infectious disease specialist whose work has centered on HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, COVID-19, and other complex infectious illnesses, she has devoted her professional life to serving underserved and culturally diverse communities while advancing compassionate, equitable healthcare in New York City and around the world. Through clinical care, medical education, and international humanitarian service, she has consistently demonstrated that medicine is as much an act of social justice as it is a scientific discipline.

Dr. Fabbri earned bachelor's degrees in biology and Spanish from Washington University in St. Louis before entering Upstate Medical University, where she received her medical degree in 1996. Unsure of her eventual specialty when she began medical school, she gravitated toward internal medicine because of its emphasis on solving complex medical problems and building long-term relationships with patients. During her clinical training, the HIV/AIDS epidemic profoundly influenced the direction of her career.

At a time when effective HIV treatments were still limited and stigma surrounding the disease remained widespread, Fabbri found herself drawn toward a patient population many others avoided. Witnessing colleagues hesitate to care for patients with HIV only



Dr. Fabbri, second from left, with American and Russian partners on an American International Health Alliance trip to Russia

strengthened her resolve. Motivated by a deep belief in social justice and equal access to compassionate healthcare, she chose infectious diseases as the field where she could make the greatest difference in the lives of patients often marginalized by society.

Following graduation from Upstate, Fabbri completed her residency in internal medicine at Lenox Hill Hospital in New York City before pursuing a fellowship in infectious diseases at New York University Medical Center. She subsequently joined NYC Health + Hospitals/Elmhurst, where she spent more than two decades caring for one of the most ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse patient populations in the United States.

Elmhurst's mission of providing

high-quality care regardless of immigration status or ability to pay closely reflected Fabbri's own values. Throughout her career there, she cared for patients living with HIV, tuberculosis, and other infectious diseases, including individuals from underserved communities, incarcerated women from Rikers Island, and newly arrived immigrants facing significant barriers to healthcare. She became known not only for her clinical expertise, but also for her empathy, humility, and unwavering commitment to treating every patient with dignity and respect.

Fabbri's humanitarian work extended well beyond New York City. As a volunteer with the American International Health Alliance, she traveled repeatedly to Russia and Ethiopia to help strengthen HIV care

in resource-limited settings. Working alongside physicians, nurses, and healthcare leaders, she helped develop systems for HIV prevention, patient care, and case management while mentoring local clinicians and fostering lasting international partnerships. She also welcomed visiting physicians to Elmhurst, sharing clinical expertise and helping them adapt successful models of HIV care for use in their home countries.

For this work, Fabbri received the Presidential Volunteer Service Award in 2007 in recognition of hundreds of volunteer hours dedicated to improving global HIV care. She has described those experiences as among the most meaningful of her career, reinforcing her belief that physicians around the world share a common commitment to improving patients' lives despite differences in resources, healthcare systems, or political circumstances.

Throughout her career, Fabbri has also remained deeply committed to educating future physicians. As an assistant professor of medicine, she has trained residents and medical students in both the science of infectious diseases and the humanistic principles that define exceptional patient care. She frequently encouraged trainees to explore literature that examined the physician-patient relationship and the social dimensions of illness, emphasizing that understanding patients' lives is every bit as important as understanding their diseases.

That philosophy proved especially important during the COVID-19 pandemic. As an attending physician at Elmhurst Hospital, one of the nation's earliest and hardest-hit epicenters, Fabbri was a calm presence—helping select patients for trials, triaging limited medications, treating infections other than COVID

(hospital acquired), working with infection control, and supporting house staff amid overwhelming patient volumes and extraordinary uncertainty.

In addition to her clinical work, Fabbri has contributed to the medical literature through publications on HIV/AIDS, COVID-19, tuberculosis, malaria, *Legionella pneumoniae*, and other infectious diseases, helping advance knowledge in a field that has continually evolved throughout her career.

Today, Fabbri practices with Optum Medical Care on Long Island. Colleagues describe her as endlessly curious, humble and deeply compassionate—someone who approaches every patient, coworker, and learner with kindness and respect. Patients consistently praise her willingness to listen carefully, explain complex medical issues clearly, and go the extra mile on their behalf.

Whether caring for patients with HIV during the height of the AIDS epidemic, strengthening healthcare systems overseas, mentoring young physicians, or standing on the front lines during COVID-19, Fabbri has consistently placed humanity at the center of her work, exemplifying the compassion, service, and commitment to equal access and quality care that define the Humanitarian Award.



Dr. Fabbri, second from left, in Ethiopia, where she helped strengthen HIV care through the American International Health Alliance