

Dr. Carolyn L. Rochester Wins ATS Assembly on Pulmonary Rehabilitation Lifetime Achievement Award



The American Thoracic Society (ATS) presented [Carolyn Rochester, MD, FCCP](#), with the Assembly on Pulmonary Rehabilitation Lifetime Achievement Award at the ATS International Conference in late May 2024 in San Diego.

Presented annually, the award recognizes a “clinician and/or researcher who is considered to have made a lifetime contribution to the advancement of Pulmonary Rehabilitation.”

“I am deeply honored,” said Rochester, professor of medicine (pulmonary, critical care). “There are many people in this field deserving of this award.”

Rochester is the director of the [Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease \(COPD\) Program](#) within the [Section of Pulmonary, Critical Care, and Sleep Medicine](#) (Yale PCCSM) at Yale, and the director of the Pulmonary Rehabilitation Program at the Veterans Affairs Connecticut Healthcare System (VACHS). She has been with Yale-PCCSM since 1991, and played integral roles in establishing both programs.

She is passionate about advocacy and has held numerous leadership roles at ATS throughout the years, most recently co-chairing the development of the ATS clinical practice guideline on pulmonary rehabilitation, as well as serving on the Quality Improvement and Implementation Committee. She has been involved in nearly every ATS scientific and policy statement on pulmonary rehabilitation since the 1990s.

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Maor Sauler, MD

“Dr. Rochester's dedication to patient care and pulmonary rehabilitation has made a significant impact on the lives of patients and moved the field forward in a profound way. This Lifetime Achievement Award is a well-deserved recognition of her contributions and lasting influence,” said [Maor Sauler, MD](#), associate professor of medicine (pulmonary), who works with Rochester.

Specializing in caring for people with COPD, Rochester says the most rewarding part of her work is seeing her patients' emotional well-being and lives improve.

The single most rewarding aspect of my work is working with patients in general, but in particular those who are very limited by severe shortness of breath and debility, and whose quality of life has declined because they feel that there's no way forward with their lung disease. When they participate in pulmonary rehabilitation, they find out dramatically otherwise, and it gives them a new lease on life.

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Studies show that patients who participate in pulmonary rehabilitation have improvement with exercise tolerance and shortness of breath, as well as the ability to perform daily living activities, and even depression and anxiety improves significantly. The challenge, though, is how grossly underutilized it is because many healthcare professionals consider it a "last ditch effort" or last resort intervention. It is equally, or in some cases more effective, than pharmacotherapy for people with chronic respiratory disease. Rochester wants other medical professionals to know how beneficial it is to begin a program and receive treatment much earlier on. She would even like to see billboards and commercials advocating for patients to ask their health care providers about pulmonary rehabilitation.

In 2015, Rochester led an international project that developed a policy statement on the gap between proven benefits of pulmonary rehabilitation and the actual delivery of pulmonary rehabilitation services to patients worldwide. It made a series of recommendations, and proposed actionable items that could be undertaken worldwide to try to advance awareness and utilization of pulmonary rehabilitation.

Back in October 2023, she also received the Thomas L. Petty Distinguished Pulmonary Scholar Award from the American Association of Cardiovascular and Pulmonary Rehabilitation (AACVPR).

We are proud of Dr. Rochester's achievements and grateful for her contributions. Just think about it—last year she was a recipient of the Dr. Thomas L. Petty Distinguished Pulmonary Scholar from AACVPR, this year the ATS Assembly on Pulmonary Rehabilitation Lifetime Achievement Award. What an amazing display of well-deserved recognition!

Naftali Kaminski, MD

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