



CONNECTICUT ASSOCIATION FOR
Marriage & Family Therapy

SERVICE TO FAMILIES AWARD 2014
Jeri Hepworth, Ph.D., LMFT and Robert G. Ryder, Ph.D



This year, in honor of our conference theme of innovation, we are marking the way that love and relationship tends to break new ground. The CTAMFT Board is delighted to present the Service to Families award to a couple who has terrifically impacted the fields of family studies, family therapy and family medicine. They have both blazed individual trails, while expanding their influence exponentially as a partnership. **Dr. Robert Ryder and Dr. Jeri Hepworth** are this year's honorees.



Robert Ryder, former Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at UCONN gained national recognition for the Family Studies Department during his tenure, training numerous professionals and educating outstanding scholars in the fields of Human Development, Family Studies and Marriage and Family Therapy. He was instrumental in expanding service learning in Child Development and establishing an interdisciplinary Gerontology program that collaborated with the Medical School, Nutrition as well as Allied Health and Nursing. He was a researcher on the effects of parental loss on intimate relationships and wrote extensively.

He passed away recently, surrounded by his many loved ones and friends. I unfortunately did not meet Robert, but his work—as reflected in his writings and through the voices of those who were privileged to learn from him . . . work with him . . . engage with him—represents a consistent and fundamental belief in human dignity and humane connectedness, and a multidimensional worldview. He believed that *“We should not stand for trying quixotically, to legislate simplicity into relationships,”* that *“It is not contradiction and paradox that drive us crazy, contradiction and paradox are*

inevitable. Rather ... it is ... intolerance for these things, intolerance for inevitable ambiguity that is most destructive of our sanity.”

Robert’s philosophy of teaching asked for students to go beyond their comfort levels. *“We are reminded of the old story of the young writer seeking instruction from the senior accomplished author. The young writer boasts of value for humaneness being able already to write with great ease and facility. The senior person replies, I hope to teach you to write with great difficulty.”*

He asks us to remain congruent.

“If therapists become known as individuals who pretend things they do not really feel or believe, it will become more difficult to be believed.”

And he asks us to remain humble.

“Midwives [are similar to therapists] – they make birth easier to happen but they don’t make it happen ... critical incidents in therapy are paper tigers, they look real but blow away when a match or breeze hits them.”

Jeri Hepworth one of our Division’s Past Presidents, is a national leader in the field of teaching family focused approaches to medicine. Dr. Hepworth is a Professor, Associate Residency Director, and Director of Behavioral Sciences in the Department of Family Medicine at the University of Connecticut School of Medicine and St. Francis Hospital and Medical Center. Dr. Hepworth is the Past President of the Society of Teachers of Family Medicine. She is co-author of **The Shared Experience Of Illness** published by Perseus books, and **Medical Family Therapy** published by Basic Books.

We are lucky to share a credential with her as LMFTs. Her extraordinary leadership, particularly in the area interdisciplinary alliances with health providers can be an inspiration to all of us. In her words, regarding her Presidency with the Society of Teachers of Family Medicine she wrote, *“Not surprisingly, attending my first meetings [with physicians groups] was intimidating. But, on the first morning, I received this email from my husband, Robert Ryder, ‘you are not a non-physician. You were elected to represent the educators in family medicine. So you represent the future of family medicine. Go do good work.’ I must say, I walked a bit taller after that email, and over the last couple of years of leadership within national family medicine, I take these statements very much to heart. And I want others to recognize these truths.”*

“I enjoyed giving talks as President of STFM. Unlike presentations about my work, I learned that I didn’t need to hold back, because I wasn’t talking about me. I was representing something greater than me. To be grandiose and also accurate, I was able to talk about a future and a vision of compassionate, effective health care. It wasn’t a form of bragging about

my work or ideas; it became a responsibility to do the best I can to help achieve our common goals.”

“Illness, and certainly chronic or end-stage illness, is an existential crisis ... part of a physician’s strategy should be to determine who would be helpful to talk with patients and families. This can include traditional mental health clinicians or spiritual leaders. We can all encourage these conversations with patients, as well as facilitate ways for families to communicate with all of the clinicians involved in their care.”

*Presented by Denise Parent, LMFT
President, CTAMFT*