



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

May 3, 2021

Contact:

Julia Kersey

[Julia.Kersey@heart.org](mailto:Julia.Kersey@heart.org) / 312-476-6684

## **OPELLA ERNEST, MD TO RECEIVE AMERICAN HEART ASSOCIATION'S PRESTIGIOUS HEART OF GOLD AWARD AT 2021 CHICAGO HEART BALL**

Opella Ernest, MD, executive vice president and chief operating officer at Health Care Service Corporation (HCSC), will receive the American Heart Association's prestigious Heart of Gold Award at the Chicago Heart Ball on Thursday, May 6. The award is given to a member of the community who demonstrates a relentless commitment to creating a world of longer, healthier lives.

"Our communities deserve quality, affordable health care, and that starts with addressing the barriers to good care, like access to nutritious, healthy foods and financial wellbeing," said Dr. Opella Ernest, HCSC executive vice president and chief operating officer. "I'm honored to receive the Heart of Gold award recognizing our company's efforts to create a more equitable health care system and improve the health of all Chicagoans."

HCSC operates through the health plans in Illinois, Montana, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Texas. In her role, Dr. Ernest leads the company's customer service, information technology, health care management, and data & analytics solutions. HCSC Operations provides the foundational infrastructure to provide members access to high quality, affordable care in their communities.

As chair of the American Heart Association's Metro Chicago board of directors, Dr. Ernest works tirelessly to address the health disparities seen in communities on Chicago's South and West sides. She served as chair of the 2014 Chicago Heart Walk, raising vital funds for the Heart Association's medical research and community engagement initiatives, and she was instrumental in bringing the Social Impact Fund to Chicago. Through the Social Impact Fund, the Heart Association supports organizations who are committed to breaking down the social and economic barriers that prevent people from living longer, healthier lives.

"Dr. Opella Ernest is a relentless advocate for health equity in Chicago, and we are proud to recognize her with this year's Heart of Gold award," said Lisa Hinton, the American Heart Association's senior vice president and Metro Chicago executive director. "While she works humbly behind the scenes to address social and economic disparities in our city, you can see the impact of her commitment throughout Chicago. Her leadership on our board and vision for a healthier Chicago will be changing lives for years to come."

Previously, Dr. Ernest served as senior vice president and chief clinical officer of HCSC, where she was responsible for clinical strategy and operations. She has also served as divisional senior vice president and chief medical officer of Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Illinois, where she led the team responsible for over 60,000 contracted providers. A board-certified family physician, she has a degree in medicine from The Ohio State University College of Medicine and a bachelor's degree from the University of Michigan.

**About the American Heart Association**

The American Heart Association is a relentless force for a world of longer, healthier lives. We are dedicated to ensuring equitable health in all communities. Through collaboration with numerous organizations, and powered by millions of volunteers, we fund innovative research, advocate for the public's health and share lifesaving resources. The Dallas-based organization has been a leading source of health information for nearly a century.

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