

# VILCEK FOUNDATION

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## **Dr. Mona Hanna-Attisha, Flint Whistleblower, Receives Inaugural Award for Immigrant Healthcare Leaders**

**Foreign-born pediatrician honored by Vilcek and Gold foundations  
for demonstrating extraordinary humanism in healthcare**

**New York, NY, May 20, 2019** — The [Vilcek Foundation](#) (New York, NY) and [The Arnold P. Gold Foundation](#) (Englewood Cliffs, NJ) are pleased to announce the creation of a new joint award, the Vilcek-Gold Award for Humanism in Healthcare, and its inaugural recipient, Dr. Mona Hanna-Attisha. Dr. Hanna-Attisha, a pediatrician and associate professor at Michigan State University College of Human Medicine, is an immigrant born in the United Kingdom to parents of Iraqi descent; she is receiving the award for research and activism that brought national attention to the widespread lead poisoning of children in Flint, Michigan through the public water supply.

Dr. Hanna-Attisha's public health activism arises from a deep wellspring of humanism—an ideal that puts human interests, values, and dignity at the core of healthcare. The Vilcek and Gold foundations sought to honor the impact of humanism and compassion in medicine while spotlighting immigrant leaders in American healthcare when they joined forces to create the award.

“One does not have to look far to find evidence of immigrant contributions to American society, and medicine is no exception,” said Dr. Jan Vilcek, Chairman and CEO of the Vilcek Foundation. “With the Vilcek-Gold Award, we are proud to honor immigrants in healthcare who serve the American public with both their hearts and their minds.”

“With this new joint award, we are so pleased to extend the foundation's annual honors to recognize foreign-born healthcare professionals who embody the very core of healthcare: humanism joined with scientific excellence,” said Gold Foundation President and CEO Dr. Richard I. Levin. “As our first honoree, Dr. Hanna-Attisha provides a historic mark with her unwavering and courageous commitment to patients and the well-being of our nation.”

Upon the rise of fascism, oppression, and dictatorship in Iraq under Saddam Hussein's rule, Dr. Hanna-Attisha immigrated with her family to the United States in 1980. They settled in Michigan, where she later received her bachelor's and master's degrees in public health from the University of Michigan, her medical degree from Michigan State University College of Human Medicine, and completed her residency at Children's Hospital of Michigan in Detroit.

In September 2015, Dr. Hanna-Attisha's research uncovered high blood lead levels found in Flint children after the city's water supply was switched to a new source as a part of austerity measures in 2014. Despite denials from state officials that the water source was responsible for the elevated blood lead levels, Dr. Hanna-Attisha's persistent advocacy, along with that of Flint community activists, forced city management to acknowledge wrongdoing, switch the water supply back to a safe source, and commit to long-term public health measures to mitigate the lead poisoning.

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She is receiving the Vilcek-Gold Award for Humanism in Healthcare not only for this monumental work, but also for her continued activities as the director of the Michigan State University–Hurley Children’s Hospital Pediatric Public Health Initiative, serving as a champion for underprivileged kids worldwide.

Her efforts have since made international impact as she has testified before the United States Congress twice, was presented the Freedom of Expression Courage Award by PEN America, and was named one of *Time* magazine’s 100 Most Influential People in the World. In 2011, as a faculty member at Wayne State University in Detroit, she was recognized as a role model of humanistic care and inducted into the Gold Humanism Honor Society.

Dr. Hanna-Attisha’s deep commitment to humanism is illuminated in her recently published bestselling book, *What the Eyes Don’t See: A Story of Crisis, Resistance, and Hope in an American City*. She writes, “Physicians need to be trained to see symptoms of the larger structural problems that will bedevil a child’s health and well-being more than a simple cold ever could... When we know about the child’s environment, we can treat these kids in the best, most holistic way, which will leave them with much more than just a prescription for amoxicillin.”

The award will be presented at [Learn Serve Lead 2019: The AAMC Annual Meeting](#) this November in Phoenix, Arizona. The Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) has been a champion for immigrant physicians and their contributions to academic medicine, and Dr. Hanna-Attisha will share her insights as part of the Voices in Medicine and Society lecture series during the meeting. The award includes an unrestricted cash prize of \$10,000, which she has pledged to donate to the Flint Kids Fund, part of The Community Foundation of Greater Flint, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

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## About the Vilcek Foundation

The Vilcek Foundation was established in 2000 by Jan and Marica Vilcek, immigrants from the former Czechoslovakia. The mission of the foundation, to honor the contributions of immigrants to the United States and to foster appreciation of the arts and sciences, was inspired by the couple’s respective careers in biomedical science and art history, as well as their appreciation for the opportunities they received as newcomers to this country.

## About The Arnold P. Gold Foundation

The Arnold P. Gold Foundation was created 30 years ago to infuse the human connection into healthcare. The foundation engages schools, health systems, companies, and individual clinicians in the joy and meaning of humanistic healthcare, so that they have the strength and knowledge to ensure patients and families are partners in collaborative, compassionate, and scientifically excellent care.

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