



2026 Alumni Professional Achievement Award Dr. Marsha Ford, Class of 1971

The Alumni Professional Achievement Award recognizes significant contributions alumni have made to their fields while exemplifying high moral and professional ethics.

Dr. Marsha Ford is being honored with the 2026 Alumni Professional Achievement Award for her outstanding accomplishments in state, national and international emergency medicine and poison center associations.

Dr. Ford earned a Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy and Religion with minors in History and English in 1971 from Winthrop College. She graduated from the Medical University of South Carolina with a Doctor of Medicine degree in 1979 and completed her Medical Toxicology Fellowship at Bellevue Hospital Center, University Hospital and New York City Poison Control Center in New York, New York. She did her residency at Brookdale Hospital in Brooklyn, New York. She credits her Winthrop liberal arts education with her communication, research and leadership skills and for giving her the opportunity to read “The Odyssey” before it was cool!

Dr. Ford began her emergency medicine (EM) career in 1982 at what is now Atrium-Carolinas Medical Center in Charlotte, North Carolina. After initially training in internal medicine, she realized she loved and needed the pace, challenge and –yes—the chaos of the emergency department (ED). She subsequently achieved the rank of Adjunct Professor of Emergency Medicine at UNC-Chapel Hill School of Medicine. In 1990, she completed a medical toxicology fellowship at NYU-Bellevue. Over a 32-year career, she taught, lectured, wrote research studies and didactic articles/chapters, performed clinical and public health research, and edited a toxicology textbook.

She founded and served as the first Medical Director for North Carolina Poison Control, a position she held for 17 years.

Dr. Ford has been active in state, national and international emergency medicine and poison center associations. She was President of the North Carolina Chapter of Emergency Physicians (NCCEP). As chair of the NCCEP Legislative Committee, she shepherded through a law in North Carolina establishing the “Prudent Layperson” definition of an emergency, thus requiring insurance companies to pay for ED visits that a “prudent layperson” would have deemed an emergency. She was an American College of Emergency Physicians (ACEP) councillor/alternate councillor for 27 years, serving on and chairing numerous committees and task forces. Internationally, she delivered a series of lectures in Syria—Damascus, Homs, Aleppo, Deir Ezor—sponsored by the U.S. Agency for International Development and the Ministry of Health in Syria. She has also lectured in Copenhagen; Kemer, Turkey; Acapulco; Sydney; and Brussels.



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In 1990, she recognized a need for emergency physicians to be involved in state legislative activities, not just those at the federal level. She worked with several state chapters to obtain funding for an educational video, then organized efforts to support development of formal state legislative initiatives. This resulted in the creation of the State Government Relations department by the ACEP. Today, ACEP's state advocacy initiatives are utilized by states around the country and include legislation, model bills, tool kits and policies that empower local chapters to pass legislation protecting physician autonomy, patient care quality and emergency department safety.

In 1994, Dr. Ford organized the inaugural ACEP Research Forum; one year later, when budgetary concerns threatened the Forum's existence, she worked with staff to append the Forum to a larger meeting. This saved the fledgling conference. Over the years, it has grown and is now fully integrated into Scientific Assembly, ACEP's premier four-day national meeting. In 2025, more than 620 abstracts, posters, plenary sessions and international projects were presented at the Forum.

Dr. Ford served on the Medical Toxicology Sub Board of the American Board of Emergency Medicine, including two years as Chair. She was President of the American Association of Poison Control Centers from 2012-2014. In 2013, she delivered testimony on the value of poison centers to the Subcommittee on Health, Committee on Energy and Commerce, U.S. House of Representatives. She currently serves as a board member of the Medical Toxicology Foundation.

Her state and national awards include Emergency Physician of the Year, the George Podgorny Service Award for Dedicated and Outstanding Service in the Field of Emergency Medicine, the Council Meritorious Service Award, the Lifetime Achievement Award, the Council Curmudgeon Award and the John A. Rupke Legacy Award.

Dr. Ford has been a loyal supporter of Winthrop, creating scholarships and giving back to various areas on campus, including support for the Political Science department and student journalists working for the Johnsonian, as she did during her time as a student.

Dr. Ford is a native of Great Falls, South Carolina. She is now retired and resides in Atlanta, Georgia.