

Dear Members of the Collaborative Family Healthcare Association,

I am honored to nominate **Dr. Jodi Polaha** for the Collaborative Family Healthcare Association's **Don Bloch Award**. I submit this nomination on behalf of the faculty of the Institute for Integrated Behavioral Health at East Tennessee State University, all of whom enthusiastically endorse it. Together, we represent faculty colleagues, former trainees, and collaborators whose careers have been shaped by Jodi's mentorship. The award criteria describe Don Bloch as an original thinker, a relentless builder, and the ultimate connector. We can think of no individual whose work and character more fully embody all three qualities than Jodi.

I first met Jodi in 2011, when she interviewed me as a prospective graduate student. Over the next fifteen years, she became my advisor, clinical supervisor, mentor, and ultimately my colleague. At every pivotal point in my career, Jodi was there, not simply offering guidance, but creating opportunities for me. As one example, during my internship she picked up the phone and called the Chair of Pediatrics at ETSU to advocate for the creation of a postdoctoral fellowship for me. That conversation became a fellowship, and that fellowship became the faculty career in Pediatrics I have now spent more than nine years building. Over time, I realized my experience was far from unique. Again and again, I have watched Jodi recognize potential in people, then act decisively to create opportunities that change the trajectory of their careers for the better.

An innovative and visionary thinker. Don Bloch was celebrated for envisioning possibilities that others had not yet imagined. Jodi has that same capacity. As an example, six years ago she proposed an idea to our College of Medicine Dean that had no precedent in our health system: an institute within the College of Medicine that would simultaneously expand integrated behavioral health services, train behavioral health providers, prepare physicians for team-based care, and build a sustainable workforce pipeline for one of the nation's most underserved regions. That vision became ETSU's Institute for Integrated Behavioral Health, and the principles she articulated in that first conversation continue to guide its work today. Beyond her work at ETSU, her scholarship as Editor-in-Chief of *Families, Systems, & Health*, work as AHRQ Integration Academy Principal Investigator and her research in implementation science and fidelity measurement have challenged the field to ask not only what works, but how integrated care can be implemented, sustained, and continuously improved.

A leader who keeps building. Don Bloch was known for turning ideas into action, and Jodi has done the same throughout her career. She has secured multiple HRSA Behavioral Health



Workforce Education and Training grants, expanded integrated behavioral health services throughout our region, and developed training pathways that have produced well over one hundred graduate trainees in integrated behavioral health. More importantly, she has built a workforce pipeline for Southern Appalachia, creating opportunities for psychologists, social workers, counselors, and other behavioral health professionals to train and remain in the communities that need them most. Many of those trainees now serve as integrated behavioral health faculty and clinicians across the region. Jodi is never content simply to sustain what already exists. She is continually identifying the next trainee to mentor, the next partnership to cultivate, and the next unmet need the field has yet to address.

The ultimate connector. Above all, this is the quality that most clearly links Jodi to Don Bloch. The fellowship Jodi helped create for me is only one example among many. She helped establish the CFHA Pediatrics Special Interest Group, served on the CFHA Board of Directors, has served for over 10 years on the Research and Evaluation Committee, and has devoted more than twenty years to strengthening the organization. Throughout that time, she has also served as one of CFHA's greatest ambassadors, bringing students and early-career professionals into the organization, connecting them with mentors, encouraging them to present their work, review manuscripts, serve on committees, and ultimately become leaders themselves. She remembers not only who people are, but what they hope to become, and then she makes the introduction, creates the opportunity, or starts the conversation that moves them one step closer.

The colleagues signing this nomination are living evidence of that gift. We include former trainees who are now faculty psychologists, social workers, and clinicians whose education was made possible through programs Jodi built, and collaborators whose careers flourished because she saw potential in them. Our stories differ in the details, but they share the same theme – Jodi created opportunities that allowed us to move forward.

Jodi's instinct for building relationships extends well beyond academia. She also serves as an elected Washington County Commissioner, applying the same instinct for building partnerships and strengthening communities that has defined her leadership in integrated care. Whether she is strengthening behavioral health systems, mentoring future professionals, or serving her community, Jodi leads with optimism, generosity, and an unwavering belief in the potential of others.

Don Bloch's influence was measured not simply by the institutions he led or the ideas he generated, but by the people whose lives and careers he changed. The same is true of Jodi. Her impact is unfolding in the students she is mentoring today, the behavioral health workforce she has cultivated throughout Appalachia, the partnerships she continues to build, and the



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community of integrated care professionals she has strengthened through CFHA. For her original thinking, her commitment to building lasting institutions, and her extraordinary gift for recognizing and developing the potential of others, we offer our strongest possible endorsement of Dr. Jodi Polaha for the Don Bloch Award.

Sincerely,

Matthew Tolliver

Matthew Tolliver, Ph.D.

Associate Professor and Assistant Director, ETSU Institute for Integrated Behavioral Health

on behalf of the Institute for Integrated Behavioral Health:

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