



## COMMUNITY NEWS

# AAHPO Honors Healthcare Providers for Their Service at Winter Brunch

By Stephan S. Nigohosian

NORTH BERGEN, N.J. — The Armenian American Health Professionals Organization (AAHPO) held its Annual Winter Brunch at the Waterside Restaurant here in January, where more than 100 members and supporters from New York, New Jersey and Connecticut joined to mark the organization's successful 2023 philanthropic initiatives.

The event culminated in a Service Award presentation featuring this year's Honorees, AAHPO members Raffi Barsoumian, MD, and Ara Kayayan, MD. Both were recognized for their altruistic dedication and professionalism toward AAHPO's mission of connecting Armenian healthcare professionals. Their work also improved the health services of the Armenian community

Philadelphia-based surgeon, Dr. Raffi Barsoumian, for his humanitarian work with the National Center of Burns and Dermatology in Yerevan. Barsoumian was instrumental in delivering desperately-needed treatment, medical equipment and supplies to severely burned victims of the Artsakh conflict.

After an introduction and presentation of the award by AAHPO Vice President Garbis Baydar, MD, Barsoumian shared details of his firsthand experience helping Armenians in the motherland. "It was heartbreaking to see the life-altering injuries that teenage Armenian servicemen sustained on the front lines of battle," Barsoumian recounted. "After speaking with the surgeons at the Burn Hospital, I discovered that they didn't have even some of the most basic tools to treat burn patients."

Determined to rectify the situation, Bar-



From left, Dr. Raffi Barsoumian, Dr. Garbis Baydar and Dr. Larry Najarian

in the New York metropolitan area as well as Armenia, including the displaced people of Artsakh.

The event began with a moving a cappella rendition of *Hayr Mer*, sung by Dr. Kayayan and Deacon Levon Capan, MD. AAHPO President Larry Najarian, MD, then thanked all members for volunteering their time, knowledge and expertise to help those in need.

"It is very humbling to reach out to many of you when someone is in crisis, either here or in Armenia, and know that you will do all you can to help them," he said. "You've always answered the call and provided a safety net to the community, assisting with countless medical needs the diverse fields of healthcare expertise you all possess."

AAHPO's membership includes doctors, nurses/nurse practitioners, dentists, pharmacists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, nutritionists and many other healthcare professionals.

Next was the Service Awards Honorees Presentation, starting with the recognition of

soumian utilized AAHPO's telehealth resources and network of healthcare providers to help source, purchase and ship skin grafting equipment and supplies to Armenia. He also travelled to Armenia on multiple occasions to provide his surgical skills to treat the soldiers who put their lives on the line to defend their country. Barsoumian emphasized that none of his efforts would have been possible without the assistance of others. "This was a collaborative endeavor that involved many people working toward a common, humanitarian cause," he said. "I am grateful to the extraordinary efforts of the dozens of volunteers who agreed to take the equipment to Armenia. They – along with the soldiers – deserve our recognition and gratitude."

The event's second Service Award Honoree, Dr. Ara Kayayan, an internal medicine specialist based in Albany, NY, was recognized for his humility, patient-centric approach to medicine and devotion to helping the global Armenian community. Kayayan has repeatedly demonstrated his willing-



From left, Dr. Larry Najarian, Dr. Ara Kayayan and Dr. Garbis Baydar



Young healthcare providers who are some of the newest members of AAHPO

ness to provide around-the-clock emergency medical response and counsel at a moment's notice. One example of this was in 2022, when Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan was transported via helicopter to Albany Medical Center's Level One Trauma Center after being gravely injured in an automobile accident.

Kayayan, one of the first medical professionals called to assist, reached out to AAHPO to help assemble a special advisory board of ten healthcare providers in a matter of hours. "Dr. Kayayan was our eyes and ears on the scene every day for eleven weeks, organizing a team of medical students, interns, residents and clergy to visit

the Bishop and provide his medical reports and vital signs from the specialists each day to the advisory board for evaluation and recommendations," Najarian recalled. "There is no doubt that Dr. Kayayan's erudite advice and involvement played a major role in Bishop Mesrop's complete recovery during the following months."

Upon modestly accepting the award, Kayayan described the value of serving fellow Armenians and others. "Today, we are called to continue the tradition of service and duty toward our Armenian communities in the United States and Armenia," he said. "It was a great honor to help with the management of our Primate's health and I am sure that any one of you would do the same."

The event concluded with an acknowledgement of AAHPO's newest members, including several recently-graduated medical professionals who are beginning their careers. Many expressed their appreciation for AAHPO's mentoring initiatives, which provide guidance and networking opportunities for the next generation of Armenian healthcare providers. Also noted is AAHPO's 30th anniversary this year, which will culminate with a gala banquet event on November 16, 2024 (location to be announced).

Those wishing to view future events, activities and donate to the cause may do so at [www.aahpo.org](http://www.aahpo.org)



Guests at the AAHPO annual winter brunch