James S. Withers, MD, FACP

James S. Withers, MD, FACP is founder and medical director of Pittsburgh Mercy's Operation Safety Net®, an award-winning, innovative medical and social service outreach program to people who are experiencing chronic homelessness.

Dr. Withers was raised in rural Pennsylvania, where he made house calls with his late father, Dr. Donald Withers, a family physician and delivered meals alongside his mother, June, a retired registered nurse. Dr. Withers earned his undergraduate degree at Haverford College and his medical degree at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine in 1984. His interest in service-oriented medicine grew through medical mission trips with his family to Central America and India.

After completing his medicine and chief residencies at The Mercy Hospital of Pittsburgh, he joined the hospital's full-time teaching faculty in the Department of Internal Medicine. His areas of special interest include integrated health care for people experiencing homelessness, street medicine, domestic violence, and wilderness medicine.

In 1992, with help from a Pittsburgh Mercy Care for the Poor Fund grant, Dr. Withers founded Pittsburgh Mercy’s Operation Safety Net®, the first full-time, comprehensive medical outreach service of its kind for people who are unsheltered and experiencing homelessness. As part of Pittsburgh Mercy, a member of Trinity Health, serving in the tradition of the Sisters of Mercy, the program delivers integrated health care, case management, housing follow up, and other vital health and human services to individuals living on the streets of Pittsburgh. In the past 25 years, Pittsburgh Mercy’s Operation Safety Net has reached thousands of individuals. In 2017, we served more than 1,600 persons experiencing or at risk of homelessness and, in collaboration with the Allegheny Link and others, helped 579 of them to obtain safe housing.

Dr. Withers and Pittsburgh Mercy's Operation Safety Net have been recognized internationally with numerous awards and honors for their work. Dr. Withers was named one of the 2015 Top 10 CNN Heroes. As an innovative model of care, our program is being replicated or studied in cities throughout the world.

In 2005, Dr. Withers and Operation Safety Net established the International Street Medicine Symposium to foster international collaboration and share best practices in the care of people experiencing homelessness. In 2008, with help from Pittsburgh Mercy, Dr. Withers created the Street Medicine Institute to help other communities establish street medicine programs, improve existing practice, and create student learning opportunities in street medicine. We currently have partners in cities on six continents.

Dr. Withers enjoys numerous medical teaching appointments, volunteer activities, and board memberships. He resides in Forest Hills and is the father of four adult children: Christopher, Jonathan, Gregory, and Jeneni. He is most proud of his family and the many students who have gone on to careers in service-oriented medicine.

For more information about Pittsburgh Mercy's Operation Safety Net or to make a donation in support of its work in our community, visit www.pittsburghmercy.org.