

# JAMES O'CONNELL

**President**, Boston Health Care for the Homeless Program  
**Assistant Professor of Medicine**, Harvard Medical School

---



**JAMES O'CONNELL, MD**  
Boston, MA



Dr. O'Connell graduated summa cum laude from the University of Notre Dame in 1970 and received his master's degree in theology from Cambridge University in 1972. After graduating from Harvard Medical School in 1982, he completed a residency in Internal Medicine at Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH).

In 1985, Dr. O'Connell began full time clinical work with homeless individuals as the founding physician of the Boston Health Care for the Homeless Program, which now serves over 10,000 homeless individuals and families each year in two hospital-based clinics (Boston Medical Center and MGH) and in 30 shelters and outreach sites, and on the streets of Boston.

With his colleagues, Dr. O'Connell established the nation's first medical respite program for homeless persons in September 1985, with 25 beds in the Lemuel Shattuck Shelter. This innovative program now provides acute and sub-acute, pre- and post-operative, and palliative and end-of-life care in the freestanding 104-bed Barbara McInnis House.

Working with the MGH Laboratory of Computer Science, Dr. O'Connell designed and implemented the nation's first computerized medical record for a homeless program in 1995.

From 1989 until 1996, Dr. O'Connell served as the National Program Director of the Homeless Families Program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Dr. O'Connell is the editor of *The Health Care of Homeless Persons: A Manual of Communicable Diseases and Common Problems in Shelters and on the Streets*. His articles have appeared in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, *Circulation*, the *American Journal of Public Health*, the *Journal of Clinical Ethics*, and several other medical journals.

Dr. O'Connell has been featured on ABC's Nightline, CBS Evening News and in several feature-length documentaries including Give Me a Shot of Anything and The Antidote. He has received numerous honorary degrees and awards, including the Albert Schweitzer Humanitarian Award in 2012 and The Trustees' Medal at the bicentennial celebration of MGH in 2011.

Dr. O'Connell has collaborated with homeless programs in many cities in the USA and across the globe, including Los Angeles, London, and Sydney. Dr. O'Connell's book Stories from the Shadows: Reflections of a Street Doctor was published in 2015 in celebration of BHCHP's 30th anniversary. In 2023, Dr. O'Connell work was chronicled by Pulitzer Prize winning author Tracy Kidder in Rough Sleepers, Dr. Jim O'Connell's Urgent Mission to Bring Healing to Homeless People.

Dr. O'Connell is president of BHCHP and an assistant professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School.