The Wayne Fenton Award for Exceptional Clinical Care was established in 2007 to recognize clinical providers who exemplify Dr. Fenton’s commitment to improving the daily lives of individuals with schizophrenia.

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Wayne Fenton was a gifted researcher, a caring clinician, and a talented leader of groups of scientists. He was inspiring in an understated way. These qualities are fittingly shared by this year’s recipient of the Wayne Fenton Award: Stephen R. Marder. Steve was nominated by Greer Sullivan, Grayson Norquist, Maga Jackson-Triche, and John Davis.

Wayne Fenton and Stephen Marder shared more than personal attributes; they shared endeavors. Perhaps Wayne’s largest undertaking in the years before his death was to launch the NIMH Initiatives to stimulate drug development for cognitive impairment in schizophrenia (MATRICS and TURNS). Steve was the Principal Investigator on both of these Initiatives. Once MATRICS was awarded, we saw Wayne and Ellen Stover (at the time Division Director at NIMH) frequently, and for extended visits. The bedrock for these Initiatives was the strength of the relationships, and Wayne and Steve’s shared vision of how policy can improve treatment.

During the 1990s Steve was the Director of Mental Health Services and the Chief of Psychiatry at the VA Greater Los Angeles. He is an active clinician and teacher in the specialized psychosis program at UCLA’s Semel Institute for Neuroscience, a program that he developed. Over his more than 30 years at the VA and at UCLA, Steve has been devoted to improving the lives of individuals with schizophrenia. His research and his training of outstanding clinicians have emphasized that there should be a greater concern for how people feel and the quality of their lives. This approach to patient care has affected his work as a clinician and his work as a clinical administrator, and exemplifies the commitment of Wayne Fenton to the care of individuals with schizophrenia.

I have heard Steve speak to scientists and families at conferences dozens of times, but one time sticks out in my memory. The presentation was at the annual national NAMI meeting in September 2004 in Washington, DC. Steve is a popular speaker at NAMI meetings, is well known to the local affiliates, and has been recognized by NAMI as an Exemplary Psychiatrist. The panel consisted of Steve, Wayne, and me, and the room was packed. Wayne took a broad approach to explain how drug development in schizophrenia was stymied and how NIMH can help open up this process. In contrast, Steve took a highly personal approach to discuss the challenges of going through life with cognitive limitations. He spoke directly to the audience and told them that the best therapy for their loved ones is not something a psychiatrist can give; it is getting a job, or going back to school, learning skills, meeting people, and regaining self-esteem. Steve had a focus on patient recovery long before it was a movement. He intuitively knew the importance of having hope; the belief that a difficult situation would get better. The audience responded almost in relief—it was clear that Steve not only understood the nature of the problems, but more importantly for that audience, he understood them.

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It struck me that either speaker could have given the other’s talk. Similar to Wayne, Steve lives his professional life at 2 levels simultaneously: the organizer of large groups of senior scientists, and the carefully-listening clinician when he is alone with a patient in his office. It is these qualities that make him an ideal recipient of the Wayne Fenton Award.

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