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VA employees among federal government workers honored with 2019 Sammies awards

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced two of its own were awarded the 2019 [Samuel J. Heyman Service to America Medals \(Sammies\)](#) Oct. 16 for career achievement and excellence in management by the nonprofit, nonpartisan [Partnership for Public Service](#).

[Dr. Ann McKee, Boston VA Medical Center chief of neuropathology](#) and [Victoria Brahm, director of the Tomah VA Medical Center](#) in Wisconsin were among 26 finalists selected from more than 300 employees and teams nominated across the federal government for the 2019 Sammies awards.

“VA employees continue to exemplify excellence in public service and what it means to be committed to federal service,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “I am proud of the accomplishments and achievements of these winners and all the VA employees nominated and for the hard work they’re doing on behalf of our nation’s Veterans.”

McKee’s research has been the dominant force in advancing medical science regarding the long-term effects of concussion, sub-concussion and chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE). Her work transformed the prevailing scientific paradigm regarding head trauma and demonstrated that repetitive mild head trauma is not just an acute injury — it can provoke a progressive neurodegeneration — CTE. Using increasingly larger case series of military Veterans and contact sport athletes, she published more than 80% of the world’s experience in CTE. McKee’s work has defined the full spectrum of clinical and pathological abnormalities in CTE.

Brahm was instrumental in changing the culture and path of the Tomah VA Medical Center. When she arrived at Tomah in 2015, she faced a negative work culture, low employee morale and a crisis of opioid prescription to Veteran patients. In the four years since, her work to improve employee engagement and promote non-opioid alternatives to pain management earned her the Sammies award. Under her leadership Brahm has also successfully improved the culture and work environment which she attributes to listening and engaging with employees.

The awardees were selected by a committee of leaders from government, business, foundations, academia, entertainment and the media.

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