**2025 Family Medicine Educator of the Year**

Dr. Kristi VanDerKolk

Dr. VanDerKolk is an associate professor and Family Medicine Residency Program Director at Western Michigan University Homer Stryker M.D. School of Medicine, where she has been shaping the next generation of family physicians with an unmistakable blend of rigor, relevance, and compassion.

Her impact can be seen in virtually every corner of WMed’s Department of Family and Community Medicine. She has served as clerkship director, faculty mentor, committee chair, and leader of numerous curriculum reform efforts. She doesn’t just teach—she builds the scaffolding that supports entire educational ecosystems.

Since joining WMed in 2012, Dr. VanDerKolk has become a cornerstone of academic life there. She is beloved by students and residents and respected by her peers—not only for her encyclopedic knowledge, but for her tireless efforts to ensure learning environments are equitable, inclusive, and human-centered.

Her educational leadership includes developing enduring curriculum on topics often overlooked in traditional medical training, such as gender-affirming care, stigma reduction in addiction medicine, and the intersections of race, identity, and healthcare delivery. In fact, many of the national presentations and peer-reviewed publications she has authored directly confront the barriers faced by patients and providers alike when identity and care collide.

And her passion for progress extends beyond the classroom.

She’s been a mentor to dozens of residents and faculty, an advisor to countless students, and a champion for underrepresented groups in medicine. Whether she’s standing at the front of a lecture hall or sitting one-on-one with a struggling learner, she leads with authenticity, humility, and hope.

Dr. VanDerKolk’s approach is hands-on, learner-focused, and rooted in the belief that medical education should reflect the communities we serve. She has said that her mission as an educator is not simply to graduate competent clinicians—but to prepare thoughtful, curious, and justice-oriented family physicians who are ready to meet the world’s complexity with courage.

The reach of her influence is wide. Her work has been presented at regional, national, and international conferences. She has authored dozens of peer-reviewed publications, contributed to academic textbooks, and served as a reviewer and consultant for national medical organizations. In 2023, she was named a Bronze-Level Program Director by the Association of Family Medicine Residency Directors, and her teaching has earned her WMed’s Faculty Teaching Award multiple times over the last decade.

Her colleagues describe her as “visionary,” “relentless in pursuit of excellence,” and “a grounding force for our program.” Learners describe her as “fierce and kind in equal measure.” And anyone who knows her knows that she works harder than anyone—often behind the scenes—to lift up others.

Dr. VanDerKolk’s educational philosophy isn’t just about test scores or clinical skills. It’s about the kind of doctor someone becomes when they feel seen, heard, and challenged to grow.