Dear IFNA Award Committee,

I wish to nominate Dr. Suja Somanadhan for the Innovative Contribution to Family Nursing Award. Dr. Somanadhan is currently the Head of Subject and Associate Professor in (Paediatric) Children’s Nursing. Dr. Somanadhan brings over 20 years of extensive clinical nursing experience in paediatric healthcare settings, including clinical practice, leadership, management, clinical and academic teaching, and mentoring, with a primary focus on translating evidence into practice. Dr. Somanadhan’s former role as a Research and Audit facilitator at Children Health Ireland, Temple Street (2013-2017) contributed to increased research awareness and understanding of inter-sectorial collaborations and dissemination outputs. As part of the role, Dr. Somanadhan mentored ~40 interdisciplinary projects between research, clinical audits, and quality improvements in the Irish Health Care setting, which led to policy and practice change outcomes for children and their families such as Paediatric Early Warning System (PEWS) and Quality Care Metrics (QCM).

After completing her Ph.D. in 2016, Dr. Somanadhan decided to pursue a full-time career in academia in 2017. Since then, academia as a principal investigator (PI), Dr. Somanadhan has successfully obtained prestigious grants and career development awards for several patient and family focused research projects to the value of over €300,000. Also, as a co-applicant or collaborator, part of several research grants with a value of over €300,000. Currently, Dr. Somanadhan has several research grants and is leading projects in child and family health and well-being related to rare and complex diseases, chronic illness, and genetic disorders. In 2020, Health Research Board (HRB) funded COVISION Project focusing on understanding the psychosocial impact of COVID-19 on Children and young people, a Rare Disease Research Partnership (RAINDROP) project, and a Temple Street Foundation- funded project called “SAMPI”. This latter project, SAMPI, gives a voice to children and their families with Rare Diseases via multiple methods including sand play, art therapy, music therapy, photovoice, and interviews to answer a simple research question, “what is it like for a child to live with a rare disease and how can children be best supported to express this?” Dr. Somanadhan has also been the joint lead on the tender awarded by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE), Department of Education, Ireland to co-design and deliver a national online training program for Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) in Irish schools (3,500 SNAs over 3 years, €2.2Million budget). So far, 2,500 SNA’s are qualified from this program and officially working with children with special care needs at the school settings. Currently, Dr. Somanadhan’s research team consists of two research scientists (Post-Doctoral) (0.5 FTE X2) and two Research Assistants (0.5 FTE X 2), 2 full-time funded PhD Students and 2 part-time PhD Students. Examples of some of the current projects are : Co-designing transition care program for children and their families, Social and economic Impacts of Living with rare diseases on children and their families. Dr. Somanadhan has published in highly ranked and reputable, international peer-reviewed journals and presented at national and international conferences, including masterclasses and keynote addresses. She is a reviewer of many high-impact journals and was invited to be the Guest Editor of the Special Issue of "*Public Health Research on Rare Diseases*.”

As a subject head, Dr. Somanadhan oversees the children’s nursing program with two undergraduate, five graduates, and five Children’s Nursing specific CPD programs collaborating with our clinical partners. Also, support students, academic and professional colleagues to pursue their interests in potential career paths within the organization and beyond. Through her engaging personality, Dr. Somanadhan built an extensive network of national and international interdisciplinary collaborators across the continents and strive to drive innovation and thought leadership within the community of partitioners and family caregivers.

As a patient and family-oriented researcher who conducts research in collaboration with patients (including children, families, and informal caregivers), clinicians, and decision-makers with a focus on service user priorities and outcomes that matter, to integrate research into policy and practice to improve health care outcomes and experiences. For example, Dr. Somanadhan lead the Rare Disease Partnership (RAINDROP) program in the Republic of Ireland and co-lead the Rare Disease Research Engaging Social Science (REDRESS) partnership across the Island of Ireland. The first co-designed and co-created research prioritization “Placing Families at the heart of Research” for rare diseases across the lifespan in Ireland. This project won numerous awards, including recognition for its utilization of PPI principles throughout the process while also influencing rare diseases policy, practice, education, and innovation. Dr. Somanadhan has well-established relationships and connections with patients and disability organizations. Most recently, leading an All-Ireland Rare Diseases Interdisciplinary Research Network (RAiN) funded by the Department of the Taoiseach from the Shared Island strand of Irish Research Council’s ‘New Foundations’ awards. Developing an all-Island interdisciplinary rare disease research network is the primary thrust, Secondly, evaluating the functional status, quality of life, and family management measure of children and young people living with rare diseases on the Island of Ireland and compare it with an international context. The network builds on established north-south Ireland research partnerships between universities and family focused charitable organizations. [[1]](#footnote-1)

Currently, leading academically in forming international research networks and partnerships such as Children’s Research Network (CRN), RAINDROP, and REDRESS. The Fulbright Commission has recognized her career trajectory as an emerging research leader. Dr. Somanadhan has currently developed critical and robust academic relationships with US colleagues at the department of the state, including the National Institutes of Health and the National Institute of Nursing Research (NINR). Her most recent appointments include a Higher Education Institutions representative at the children’s nursing national strategy advisory group, a Co-Chair of the Children’s Research Network Ireland and Northern Ireland, and a Board Member of the International Family Nursing Association (IFNA) and Co-lead of IFNA UK-Ireland chapter.

I hope you will consider Dr. Suja Somanadhan for the Innovative Contribution to Family Nursing Award as her accomplishments and resume are superior in focusing on family health and wellbeing of families enduring rare diseases and disorders. Her contributions have provided positive outcomes in clinical practice, education, and research through projects, publications, activities, or initiatives that demonstrate innovative and exceptional achievements. I nominate her with great pride and admiration for her leadership.

Respectfully,

Professor Stacey Van Gelderen DNP, MS, RNC-MNN, PHN

1. Rare diseases are individually unique, but collectively they share substantial unmet health and social care needs for children and their families. Rare diseases tend to be defined according to the incidence of the disease; hence, European member states define them as a disease or condition that affects fewer than 1 in 2,000 individuals. It is defined as affecting fewer than 200,000 affected individuals about 1 in 1,500 people in the US.  
   Approximately 450 million people live with a rare disease, with between 27 and 36 million, 6-8% of the EU population, residing in Europe. According to the National Institutes of Health (NIH), approximately 7,000 rare diseases affect between 25 and 30 million Americans and at least 400,000 individuals collectively on the Island of Ireland. Arguably, rare diseases are individually rare yet collectively common in society. Examples of rare disorders include cystic fibrosis, muscular dystrophy, 22q11, and ultra-rare conditions like Metachromatic leukodystrophy (MLD). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)