Nearing 30 years of service to the University of Michigan Medical School, there was never a question of whether Steven A. Telian, M.D., would take on a significant leadership role, but rather when. It came quickly, however, when he assumed the responsibility as division chief for Otology/Neurotology in 1992 upon the death of John Kemink, M.D., at the hands of a patient. He held this leadership role until 2016.

After coming to Michigan for a fellowship in otology and neurotology under Kemink and Malcolm Graham, M.D., Telian now holds the John L. Kemink, M.D., Professorship in Neurotology and is a professor of otolaryngology-head and neck surgery. For almost a quarter-century, colleagues say he has led the division with grace and substance.

"The support of my department when I was thrust into an unanticipated leadership position upon the tragic death of Dr. Kemink was amazing," Telian says. "This gave me great confidence and conviction in order to maintain and build upon the excellence that had always characterized our division."

The division boasts one of the premier cochlear implant programs in the world. Telian has pioneered and advanced surgery to preserve hearing in selected patients with acoustic neuromas. For his leadership, and accomplishments as a physician and surgeon, Telian is being honored with the Outstanding Clinician Award.

His supporters say Telian is a superb clinical researcher who is very adept at data analysis and biostatistics. Among his achievements are the steady growth of the Cochlear Implant Program — which has helped more than 3,000 patients — and development of the Vestibular Disorders Center, a center for excellence in diagnosing and treating balance disorder patients. Rooted in his leadership of these major initiatives is his insistence on spending as much time with each patient as needed to allow them to be active participants in their care.

"The Kemink Professorship was created in order to maintain clinical and educational excellence in the discipline of otology and neurotology at the University of Michigan," Telian says. "Having my colleagues nominate me for this award is a gracious affirmation that I have fulfilled that calling to the satisfaction of those who are invested most deeply in what we do together."

"Steve’s dedication to clinical practice and to his patients is second to none, as is his commitment to quality. This is something he has instilled on a daily basis for the past 30 years in his residents, fellows, colleagues and clinical staff, at large.

— Paul R. Kileny, Ph.D., professor of otolaryngology-head and neck surgery, and research professor, Center for Human Growth and Development