



Dr. Beatrice Gandara, 2019 WSDA Citizen of the Year

Maximizing Her Impact

For more than 30 years, University of Washington School of Dentistry Professor Beatrice “Bea” Gandara has leveraged her passion for dentistry and service to others to inspire new generations of dentists while also increasing access to care.

Her work with middle and high school students, as well as pre-dental undergrads, has had immense influence on building a pipeline of young people who are interested in dentistry and come from diverse and disadvantaged backgrounds.

“I can’t think of a more deserving person for this honor. Bea is one of those people doing the work on the ground and in the community in a selfless manner and with great humility. She’s been a tireless advocate for the underserved since her days as a dental student. If you’re a student she’s mentored, you couldn’t ask for a bigger supporter and believer in what you’ll bring to the profession.” – 2019 WSDA Citizen of the Year award nomination

It may be surprising to learn that the person responsible for inspiring hundreds (if not thousands) of young dentists in Washington state almost wasn’t one herself.

Yes, Dr. Beatrice “Bea” Gandara, clinical associate professor of oral medicine for the University of Washington School of Dentistry, winner of the School of Dentistry’s highest

faculty honor in 2006 — the Rothwell Award for Teaching Excellence — and, this fall, honored by her peers as the 2019 WSDA Citizen of the Year, originally set her sights not on dentistry, but rather, marine biology.

As a child growing up in East Los Angeles, Gandara wasn’t exposed to careers in health care. Neither her father (an early computer system analyst) nor her mother (a homemaker) were in the health care field. Mentorships and job shadowing events were not common at the time.

Fortunately, her love of science and math translated nicely when she switched her undergraduate major from marine biology to pre-dental at the University of Southern California. It was at USC, working alongside Dr. Charlie Goldstein, her mentor and director

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of the school's Mobile Clinic program, that she discovered her true calling.

Those experiences kick-started a remarkable career that has allowed Gandara to combine her love of teaching with her strong sense of service, inspiring new generations of dentists while changing their lives and those of countless people in the communities where they serve.

A TIRELESS ADVOCATE

Gandara is extremely modest and matter-of-fact about her WSDA Citizen of the Year honor, squeezing in an interview before the start of her class at the UW School of Dentistry.

Classes have resumed for the fall at the UW and she is teaching Foundations of Dental Medicine, a course that covers everything from substance abuse to domestic violence, pediatrics to geriatrics. It is both a clinical and lecture course.

Saturdays, you will likely find her in a community clinic somewhere in the Puget Sound region. This week it's Casa Latina, an organization for day workers located in the First Hill area of Seattle. Other times it could be Mary's Place, a nonprofit that helps women and children affected by homelessness. In both situations, Gandara works to ensure dental students provide excellent care and have opportunities to work alongside other health care students in nursing or medical

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school to provide a more holistic approach to care.

In other words, it's just a typical week for Gandara.

"We, as dentists, see people affected by so many things. We have all these skills and we can do so much, so let's go out and help people who need care and they will teach us how to be better, more culturally sensitive providers."

"Sometimes you don't have the optimal setting, but you can still take care of people," she said. "We try to go out and be oral health care facilitators as well as providers — we really want people to find a dental home. People can't always figure it out, so part of our job is to provide education and assist them in accessing care, as well as addressing emergency issues. Oral health is important."

'MAXIMIZE HER IMPACT'

Simply put, Gandara's career reflects a lifetime passion for service, teaching and caring.

The term "volunteer" doesn't accurately reflect the depth and breadth of Gandara's involvement. A glance at her curriculum vitae reveals community outreach work in seemingly every community — migrant farmworker camps, tribal schools, homeless shelters, girls' schools — all across Washington state and the Pacific Northwest.

In addition to her teaching role at the UW, Gandara is the director of the School of Dentistry's Office of Educational Partnerships and Diversity (OEPD), where she has facilitated programs designed to give dental students practical experience through community service — simultaneously providing access to care and reducing oral health inequities in the Puget Sound region. Each year she welcomes several AmeriCorps members into the OEPD program to help provide education and support in a year-long commitment.

As a faculty participant of the UW's Summer Health Professions Education Program (formerly the Summer Medical and Dental Education Program), she regularly works with pre-health professional undergraduates to support their pursuit a career in health care — specifically, dentistry. Often, these students are from disadvantaged backgrounds and might not otherwise think of health care as an accessible career path.

She has further expanded this reach to high school students through her work with the Community Health Professions Academy (CHPA), bringing middle and high school students and pre-health undergraduates together with dental students, faculty and other medical professionals to learn about careers in health care.

Dr. Jeff Parrish, a WSDA past president and chair of the 2019 Citizen of the Year nominating committee, had the opportunity to work alongside Dr. Gandara at one of her weekend outreach clinics at a migrant farmworker clinic in the Skagit Valley.

"I cannot think of anybody more passionate and more effective in motivating young people, including young dentists and dental students, to become caring and compassionate people — to reach out to others and do what we should all be doing as professionals," said Parrish.



Dr. Beatrice Gandara (left) with WSDA President Dr. Chris Delecki (right).

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more passionate and more effective in motivating young people, including young dentists and dental students, to become caring and compassionate people.”

Parrish said the Citizen of the Year Award is different from other association honors because it speaks to the individual’s service outside of their professional duties.

“We recognize that some of this is part of her job, but she does a lot of this on her own,” he added. “She uses her job as a platform to reach out and provide these opportunities for young people — that was what convinced us that she was an excellent candidate for the award. She’s not just sitting back — she’s taking advantage of her situation to maximize her impact.”

WSDA Immediate Past President Dr. Christopher Delecki praised Gandara during the Citizen of the Year Award Dinner, held in September at the House of Delegates in Spokane.

“As a dentist, as a teacher and as a citizen, Dr. Gandara embodies all we seek to celebrate and honor with the WSDA Citizen of the Year award. Her contributions to the community are multiplied by the compassion she encourages in her students, who share in her enthusiasm for community service and health equity,” said Delecki. “Dr. Gandara is passionate about not only inspiring the next generation of dentists, but the next generation of human beings, and we are all better for it.”

A SHIFT TOWARD SERVICE

Community service hasn’t always been as predominant in dental schools as it is today, particularly at the University of Washington.

Dr. Douglass Jackson, director of the Health Professions Academy and a clinical professor at the UW School of Dentistry says some of that is due to a change in students themselves: community service is now widely encouraged in high school. But the arrival of Dr. Gandara intensified that shift toward service, doubling dental students’ collective volunteer time from about 100 hours a month to over 200.



Drs. Arley Medrano (left) and Austin Mesina (right) guide a Community Health Professions Academy scholar in recreating tooth structure in wax.

“If you get to know Bea, her work in California was all about providing care in the community and that made an impression on her, and she has continued to do that to this very day,” said Jackson.

“It really did change the focus of incoming dental students: they’re about providing service to the underserved. In high school and college, community service is not an abstract concept, and so [now] it’s a natural thing to look for that in those applying to dental school,” he said.

“Having someone like Bea who is able to harness that is fantastic.”

Jackson notes the community service element pays obvious dividends to those in the community in need of care. But it also has direct bearing on increasing the pipeline of people entering the dental profession.

“The other piece Bea brings to it — the communities they serve have really been marginalized. When you think of a student who doesn’t come from a privileged background, they know what it’s like to be marginalized,” said Jackson.

“Bea is gentle and compassionate, and they believe in her, and she believes in them. So,

the number of students that want to follow her and fellow faculty and volunteer their time is increasing the pipeline of students from disadvantaged backgrounds who are pursuing careers in dental health.”

PROOF POSITIVE

Dr. Austin Mesina, a 2016 UW School of Dentistry graduate, is someone who knows the power of Dr. Gandara’s mentorship and encouragement. He basically grew up at the school, where his father works with Gandara as a patient care coordinator.

When he was a biochemistry undergrad at the UW, it was Gandara who connected him with the Summer Medical and Dental program, further fueling his idea of being a dentist.

Today, Mesina is the on-site dental director for the 45th St. Clinic for Neighborcare Health in Seattle.

“One of the things she does very, very well is make it seem like a realistic goal for anybody who’s interested,” he said. “She is a person of color doing all these great things being very successful at what she does.”

Mesina says it’s this unwavering confidence in her students that helps even the most doubting of high schoolers, undergrads —

even dental students — remain resolute. And Gandara makes sure that when her students do succeed, they are invited back into the program to serve as mentors themselves: Mesina has been a presenter in one of Gandara's outreach efforts with middle and high school students and continues to volunteer with her as an affiliate faculty member after clinic hours and on weekends.

"It's really hard to put into words how she makes you feel — her presence is very welcoming. That encouraging spirit of hers never changes," he said.

One thing Mesina knows personally and professionally is how crucial it is for students to see themselves reflected in the profession.

"I think that, as a dentist of color, if I go to a continuing education class I can guarantee I am one of a handful of people of color in that room. I do kind of stick out — I have long hair and tattoos — and I encourage that. I love that I don't look like what a dentist 'should' look like and I think that Dr. Gandara promotes that in a good way," he said.

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In fact, both Mesina and Jackson say her ability to meet students where they are is one of Gandara's best attributes.

"I think one of the biggest things in patient care that relates to teaching is she meets her students where they are. It sounds cliché but she really does that," said Jackson.

"It's especially powerful if you are a first-generation college student, coming from one of these marginalized communities. You have likely never seen a dentist that looks like you. So when you run into these people — like Dr. Mesina — you feel that you can do that because someone has gone before you and they are proof positive that it can be done."

AT A GLANCE

Name:

Dr. Beatrice Gandara

Title:

Clinical Associate Professor, Oral
Medicine

University of Washington School of
Dentistry, Seattle

Education:

University of Southern California Dental
School (Class of 1978)

General Practice Resident, Veteran's
Administration Hospital, La Jolla, CA
(1978-79)

University of Washington Oral Medicine
Specialty Program (1982-1985)

Research interests:

Saliva as a diagnostic fluid; therapy for
saliva disorders.

REWARDS ARE IMMEASURABLE

Ever the servant-leader, Gandara knows the Citizen of the Year award will help draw attention to her programs, her students and to the people and communities she serves.

"Organizing community service is like childbirth: You forget about all of the pain — the affiliation agreements, scheduling, logistics — the non-glamorous stuff, but it's worth it," she said smiling. "We really have been so lucky with volunteer faculty, but we can always use more. Otherwise you go back to the same people again and again," she added. "You don't want to burn out anyone."

Increasing the number of affiliate faculty for her programs (as well as the school's departments) is one way for people to get involved if they are looking for ways to give back and make a difference, she says.

Gandara understands the faculty application process, not to mention the time commitment, can be a bit much for some professionals. But the rewards, she says, are immeasurable.

"If getting this award is a chance to encourage others to come join us, then that's great. That's worth having the spotlight." ❖❖



UW Oral Medicine faculty and USC School of Dentistry alumni Drs. Austin Baruffi (left), Kim Espinoza (center) and Bea Gandara (right) carry on the USC Mobile Clinic spirit in the NW.

Learn More, Get Involved

Office of Educational Partnerships and Diversity (OEPD)



Office of Educational Partnerships and Diversity (OEPD) with AmeriCorps team members. L to R: Evelyn Cruz, Diana Flores, Joffrey Inocencio, Enock Adjei, Dr. Bea Gandara, and Dr. Douglass Jackson.

Connecting students with service-learning opportunities in underserved communities is one of Dr. Gandara's hallmarks.

For nearly 10 years, her leadership within the Office of Educational Partnerships and Diversity (OEPD) at the University of Washington School of Dentistry has quietly developed an array of key partnerships and community connections that enhance access to oral health care in underserved communities in Washington state and across the Puget Sound region. Gandara's efforts have grown the office and its partnerships, working with dental students to develop connections ranging from migrant farm worker communities and homeless shelters to a new outreach effort with the LGBTQ community.

"The student leadership is really important," she said. And these partnerships — including Union Gospel Mission, Latina Health Fair, Mary's Place, Teeth & Toes and more — help provide oral health education, screenings and dental care for underserved members of the community.

The OEPD's Community Health Professions Academy (CHPA) also promotes dentistry, along with medicine and other health-related professions, as career pathways for high school students from diverse backgrounds.

As with any volunteer effort, the OEPD relies heavily on volunteers from the UW School of Dentistry faculty, affiliate faculty and other segments of the dental profession to be successful.

Gandara readily admits there is some paperwork associated with becoming a UW School of Dentistry affiliate faculty member and recognizes that everyone faces tough time constraints due to personal and professional commitments. But for those who pursue volunteer opportunities, she can guarantee the experience is mutually beneficial for the patients, students and volunteer dentists alike.

"I think people may want to become involved and may not necessarily know how," she said. "Our office tries to make it, first of all, safe and appropriate for our community partners but we also make it as easy as possible for everyone. We do the stuff that is absolutely necessary to make sure people can just show up and give of the skills that they have. Those are the successful clinics."

OEPD has been very fortunate to have as many dedicated faculty as they do, Gandara adds — but that doesn't mean there isn't room for more.

"The school support for this outreach has always been there," she said. "Having more people be involved would be great. It's one of the ways they can participate in the community and make everybody healthier by helping those who don't have access to care."

If you are short on time, financial contributions to support outreach expenses are always appreciated, she added.

Learn more about volunteer opportunities at dental.washington.edu/volunteer/come-join-us.

Support dental student volunteer activities with a gift at bit.ly/AccessstoCareDonate.

Previous WSDA Citizen of the Year Recipients

- Dr./Rep. Michelle Caldier, Port Orchard, 2018
- Dr. Nhi Pham, Mukilteo, 2017
- Dr. Loree Bolin, Edmonds, 2016
- Dr. Jacqueline Angell, Vancouver, 2015
- Drs. Amy M. Winston and Barton S. Johnson, Seattle, 2014
- Dr. Raymond Damazo, North Bend, 2013
- Dr. Peter Lubisich IV, Vancouver, 2012
- Dr. Michael D. Karr, Granite Falls, 2011
- Dr. Tim C. Verharen, Bremerton, 2010
- Dr. B. Timothy Dolby, Tumwater, 2009
- Dr. John C. Winskill, Tacoma, 2008
- Dr. Mark C. Paxton, Spokane, 2007
- Dr. Eugene K. Sakai, Vancouver, 2006
- Dr. Dennis W. Kelly, Clinton, 2005
- Dr. Jeffrey L. Parrish, Duvall, 2004
- Dr. Sherwin R. Shinn, Redmond, 2003
- Dr. D. Michael Buehler, Yakima, 2002
- Dr. Dennis B. Welch, Kirkland, 2001
- Dr. Ardon L. Overby, Vancouver, 2000
- Dr. Steven J. Albright, Seattle, 1999
- Drs. Robert N. Nau, Tonasket, and Theresa Cheng, Issaquah, 1998
- Dr. Daniel K. Cheney, Bellingham, 1997
- Dr. Douglas M. O'Connor, Longview, 1996
- Dr. James C. McGraw, Bellevue, 1995
- Dr. Johnny N. Johnson, Seattle, 1994
- Dr. Vincent K. Davis, Bellingham, 1993
- Dr. David W. Parks, Wenatchee, 1992
- Dr. John M. Henricksen, Chehalis, 1991
- Dr. James N. Sledge, Spokane, 1990
- Dr. Gene Sargent, Burlington, 1989
- Dr. Donald S. Davidson, Bellevue, 1987
- Dr. Robert P. Lewis, Jr., Mercer Island, 1986
- Dr. Daniel H. Cook, Tacoma, 1985
- Dr. James K. Muller, Spokane, 1984
- Dr. Dale E. Miller, Yakima, 1983
- Dr. Alan D. Adams, Bellevue, 1982