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Estell Williams operates with compassion

March 26, 2018 By Wilson Diehl



Credit: Clare McLean

Dr. Estell Williams in the operating room with first year medical student Dorender Dankwa.

UW School of Medicine Chief Resident of General Surgery Estell Williams tries not to make much of a distinction between who she is as a doctor and who she is as a person. “I like to bring a little bit of who I am into what I do every day to allow patients to know that we’re human beings too.”

Dr. Williams, who was raised in East Oakland, California, by her dad and cousin, comes by her compassion and dedication to the community around her naturally. Her dad turned their family house into a group home for adults with mental disabilities. Her cousin became a psychiatric nurse and oversaw the group home. When Williams’s dad grew frustrated with the lack of quality daytime programming for his clients, he bought a car wash and developed it into a job training program.

“That’s what I was born into — a desire to give back to other people and see them to a place that’s better than where they were before,” says Williams.

For as long as she can remember, Williams’ desire to give back has taken the form of wanting to be a doctor. When her cousin attended nursing classes in the evening, Williams and her siblings tagged along. Williams, who was in elementary school at the time, took notes. Her notes were so good that her cousin sometimes used them.

As she got older Williams found programs that would help her pursue her goal. Like a science summer camp for middle school students where she did basic dissection of a pig’s eye and a shark’s eye, which she thought was “just the most amazing thing ever!”

Later she attended a high school program for underrepresented youth where she got to shadow doctors in a hospital. She vividly remembers peering over the drape in the first operating room she saw on her first day in the hospital and seeing a heart operation in progress. She turned to her supervising doctor and declared, “I want to do THAT!”

“We're all just trying to survive in this world the best we know how.”

Williams credits her interest in surgery specifically to learning early in life the inherent satisfaction that can come from working with your hands. Her dad worked in construction, and Williams went on jobs with him to earn a little extra allowance. She learned framing, sheetrocking, plumbing, painting and minor electrical work. “Probably a little more than basic construction,” Williams says with typical understated humility.

“I've always been used to working with my hands and building things. That tactile feedback and being able to see things materialize before you — that's probably why I was very interested in surgery.”

Williams is also very interested in figuring out how she can be most useful and have the biggest impact on communities in need.

“It can be easy for us to lose our humanity in this profession, for it to become more of a job instead of something you are called to do and privileged to do. But people are more than just that disease that is presented to you in the hospital. When I see a patient, I'm here to help them through something that may be a more challenging time in their life, just like I may come to them for something that I don't know how to do. We're all just trying to survive in this world the best we know how.”

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[Julie Stenger](#) • 3 months ago

Not enough great things can be said about this terrific woman, doctor, and human being!
Dr Estell Williams is one of my favorite residents to work with of all time. And I have worked with many!
Thank you for sharing a little more of her story.

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Genevieve Pagalilauan wants to be your forever doctor

February 27, 2018 By Wilson Diehl



Credit: Clare McLean

Dr. Genevieve Pagalilauan teaches a medical student how to administer a flu vaccine.

Dr. Genevieve Pagalilauan, internist at UW Medical Center-Roosevelt, was born in the Philippines and emigrated when she was a preschooler. “Apparently I was fluent in Tagalog, but I have no capacity to speak it now. I can’t even fake a good accent,” Pagalilauan quips with trademark good humor.

Her grandfather was an old-fashioned general practitioner in a rural community, the kind who did a little bit of everything. Their home in the Philippines was directly above his clinic, and Pagalilauan grew up hearing stories about the courtyard filling up with patients and her grandfather working in the clinic until every one of them had been seen. He practiced until he was 83 and dying of metastatic prostate cancer.

“He had bone metastasis, and he was still going down and seeing people. He practiced until he truly couldn’t anymore.”

When Pagalilauan came to medical school at UW, she thought she was going to be an emergency medicine doctor. “But what I learned about myself in medical school is I’m a continuity junkie. I couldn’t let it go — I wanted to know what happened to everybody! I learned that long-term relationships matter to me, seeing change over time matters to me, walking a path with people through the good times and the bad times matters.”

Pagalilauan takes great joy in caring for people their entire adult lives. "I'm people's hospice doctor. I can home-visit. I can get to know their families if that's helpful for them. I have a philosophy that I never shut my pager off — I don't ever want to *not* be there for my patients. Nobody has ever abused it — no one."

"Please don't use your shotgun. You just wave it at the bear and don't go outside."

"I have a sweet patient in her 90s who lives on her own on the Olympic Peninsula, and she has a shotgun by her bed in case of bears. The kickback alone would shatter everything in her body! I tell her, 'Please don't use your shotgun. You just wave it at the bear and don't go outside.' She has my cell phone number because she's alone, and it makes her feel better to have it. Once in a while she calls me, and that's OK."

As well as being committed to her patients, Pagalilauan is creative and resourceful. When she and some colleagues were looking for a way for students to practice placing a chest tube without having to spend a disproportionate amount of their budget, they came up with a simulated human chest — fashioned from neoprene, fake skin, and "a lot of pork ribs."

"I'm at Costco with a dozen slabs of ribs. It won't even fit into a normal cart — I have to use that giant flat kind. People think I'm having a massive barbecue, and I'm thinking, 'You don't want to know what I'm really doing!'"

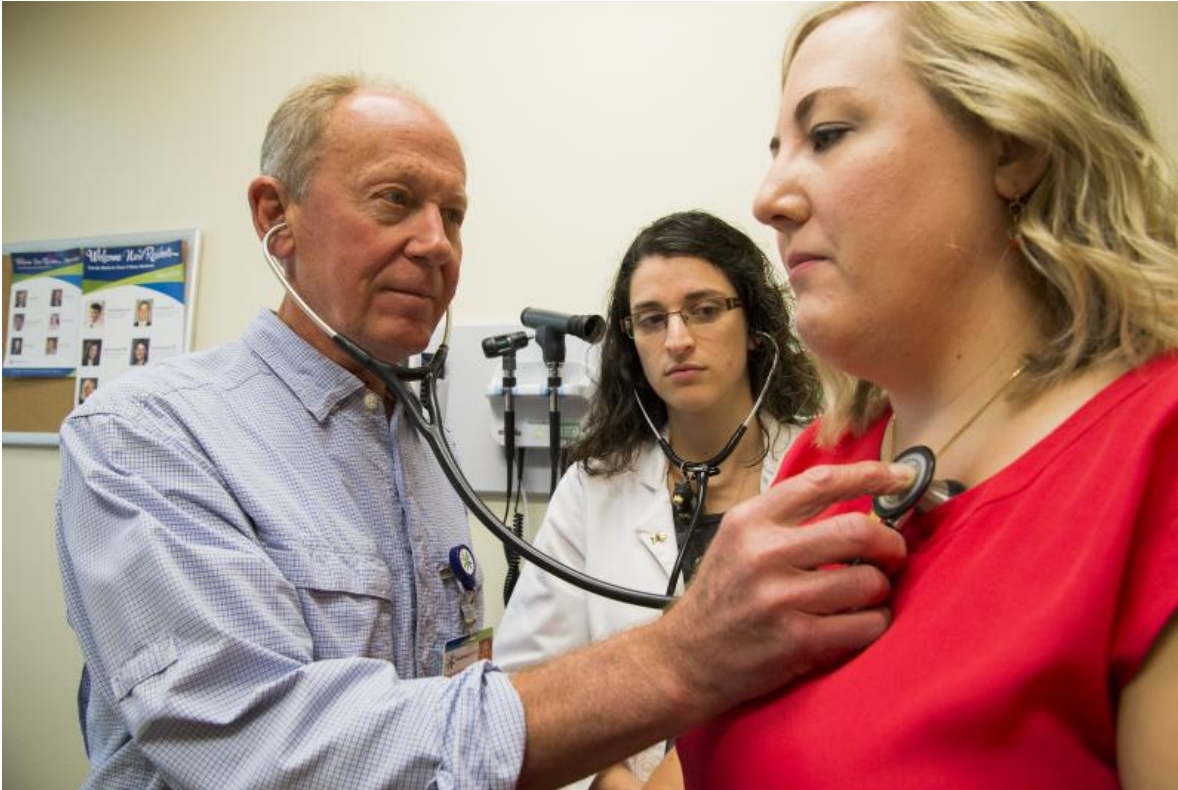
Pagalilauan was recognized by her peers with The Martin Luther King, Jr. Community Service Award in January. The award honors individuals or groups who exemplify these principles:

- Creating an environment and community where individuals can empower themselves
- Commitment to addressing community needs, particularly communities of color and low income
- Development and implementation of significant programs to improve the human condition
- Outstanding efforts to protect and empower all individuals

SHARE

It's all in the family for this Idaho physician

April 2, 2018 By Wilson Diehl



Credit: Clare McLean

You can't choose your family, but you can choose your family doctor. Dr. McLandress practices family medicine in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho.

As a UW medical student in the early 1970s, Dr. Richard McLandress was sent to the 5,000-person town of Colville, Washington, to live in a small room adjacent to the emergency department at Mount Carmel Hospital and to learn medicine hands-on.

McLandress — now a family medicine physician in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho — was one of the first-ever WWAMI test cases (well, technically a WAMI test case since Wyoming — the second 'W' — didn't join the five-state medical training program until 1996). He spent two summers doing a little bit of everything. "It was an immersion in old-time medicine. After my first summer I'd delivered 10 babies — it was amazing."

McLandress' family ties to UW run deep — as far back as 1905 when his grandmother rowed with the first Husky women's crew team. His grandfather was also a graduate, as are two of his brothers. Continuing the family tradition, his daughter is a product of UW School of Medicine.

Ever since those early days in Colville, McLandress has been committed to helping address the national and regional shortfall of family medicine physicians, especially in rural areas. In 1977 he co-founded Family Medicine Coeur d'Alene, where he has been practicing family medicine ever since. Twenty-five years later he spearheaded an effort to establish the first family medicine residency in northern Idaho — the Kootenai Clinic Family Medicine Residency, which he has directed since its inception.

Four decades after finishing his own formal medical training, what does McLandress emphasize to the next generation of doctors? The importance of the continuity of care that family medicine practitioners can provide, the necessity and value of lifelong learning, and the importance of work-life balance: vacation, time with loved ones, time away from medicine, and — of course — time with family.

McLandress' dedication to family medicine earned him the 2018 Idaho WWAMI Alumni Award for excellence in mentoring, teaching, leadership and patient care.

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Gail Gray gives new meaning to dancing around an issue

February 20, 2018 By Wilson Diehl



Credit: Clare McLean

Come March 10, Gail Gray will be ready to put on her dancing shoes and perform the salsa for hundreds of people as part of a fundraiser for homelessness. In the meantime — lots of practice.

Gail Gray is not a fan of the spotlight. She would rather be dining with a friend, attending a play, watching “SNL” or “Scandal” — pretty much anything other than putting on a costume and stage makeup and performing for an audience of hundreds. So how did this introverted director of Human Resources Policy for UW School of Medicine end up agreeing to dance the salsa on stage for 500 people?

“It was cocktail talk!” she says.

On March 10, Gray is dancing as part of a fundraising event where nine “celebrity dancers” (read: local citizens with little-to-no dance training but an abiding commitment to the cause of combatting homelessness and a willingness to endure stage fright) are each paired with a professional dancer to perform an original piece to raise money for supportive, permanent housing for homeless people.

Gray has an impressive athletic background. She ran track in high school and college, coached track and field at the Air Force Academy, and tried out for the Olympics, but she is not trained as a dancer.

“I mean, I did take salsa lessons a decade ago,” she clarifies. “I remembered the basic steps, but that’s it. I didn’t remember how to turn, anything. I’m starting from scratch.” She laughs good-naturedly at herself. “I am very coachable.”

Very coachable and not one to shy away from a challenge. In high school she applied to the Air Force Academy sight unseen because it was hard to get into. Though her dad was enlisted, Gray didn’t know exactly what she was signing on for. “I really didn’t know what I was getting into in terms of basic training and all that. I wasn’t prepared for all the yelling. But it’s an experience that I’m proud of — that I made it through.”

Did she know what she was signing on for with this dance competition? “No!” she laughs again. “I kind of just wanted to challenge myself, and it seemed like a fun thing to do even though I’m constantly wondering, *How am I going to get on stage in front of all these people and dance?*”

Three times a week Gray practices salsa with her assigned professional dance instructor, plus daily practice at home. "It's one thing to learn salsa, but also the choreography? It's super fun and super hard."

Though it may have been the cocktails talking when Gray originally agreed to participate, her dedication to "one of the most complex and challenging problems Seattle faces" carries her through.

"The amount of wealth in this city, and to have this number of people living on the street — it's hard to reconcile." Gray and her family have spent several nights in a church basement shelter "because someone needs to be there," and she will get up on stage and dance the salsa in front of hundreds of people in this festive benefit for Plymouth Housing Group (<https://www.seattledances.org/>) because someone has to do that too.

And what better way to draw attention to the discomforts of our city's homelessness crisis than by doing something that takes you out of your own comfort zone?

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Wilson Diehl → T Abe • 4 months ago

Saturday, March 10, 2018 | 5:30pm - midnight | Fremont Studios

For more info: www.seattledances.org

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Naomi Ulici • 4 months ago

Awesome! Where do we show up on March 10 to show our support?

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The longest attack of constant hiccups lasted 68 years.

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Love is in the air, glitter is on the floor

February 12, 2018 By Wilson Diehl



Putting all your cards on the table is difficult when you have 550 cards.

Come February 14, every inpatient at UW Medical Center will receive a handmade valentine. Some will be adorned with glitter and ribbons, others with puffy heart stickers and sweet Valentine's Day puns. Each one will be unique and each one — all 550 — will have been made with love for our patients.

Every midwinter for the past decade, Karen Neuhard-Forsythe, the Art Program manager for UWMC, carts boxes filled to the brim with crafting supplies to multiple workshops for faculty, staff and students to make valentines for UWMC's patients. The supplies transform a drab meeting room into a scrapbooker's dream. Boxes overflow with decorative papers, stickers, rubber stamps, paper punches, glitter glue, red-and-white-striped baker's twine, buttons, beads, ribbons, pipe-cleaners, googly eyes. For the experienced and/or brave, there is a table in the corner for embossing work — a process that involves ultra-fine-grain glitter and a sort of miniature blow torch.

Some people pop in and make a quick card or two. Others stay for hours. One woman, who has been coming since the beginning, has a habit of making 60-70 cards each year.

"People are so happy and excited to be able to do something like this," says Neuhard-Forsythe. Part of the appeal is doing something — ahem — heartfelt for patients. Also, it's undeniably fun. Many groups come back every year for a little team-building that doubles as service work and arts-and-crafts time.



Neuhard-Forsythe, a former high school art teacher, believes that people are healthier, happier and more productive when they have creative outlets in their lives. "The arts should be more than just an observational process. I strongly believe everyone should have regular opportunities to roll up their sleeves and physically engage in the creative process, whatever that might be."

Participants who have engaged in this particular creative process use words like "wonderful," "energizing" and "joyful" to describe the experience.

Not everyone is entirely sure what to do with themselves when presented with a pile of art supplies and an open-ended invitation to be creative. "Most of the questions I get are around getting started on their card, technical questions about materials because they aren't familiar with the supplies, or just a quick pep talk getting them to relax and believe in themselves and have fun." Assures Neuhard-Forsythe, "There is no wrong answer when making art!"

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