Emergency Education

Heroes can have a way of showing up in places you least expect them.

Last spring, they showed up for Physician Assistant (PA) Program student Karla Wethal.

Wethal was walking down Observatory Drive on campus when she suddenly lost consciousness and fell to the ground.

The cause: a major heart attack.

Steven Diettert, a UW Transportation Services employee working in a nearby building, saw her fall, located an automated external defibrillator, and brought it to the sidewalk.

PA student Jordan Johnson was on a passing bus when she noticed the crowd gathering. She jumped off, ran to Wethal, and upon noticing her dusky blue skin, began chest compressions. A third unknown bystander worked to maintain Wethal’s airway.

“Steven later told me they were three strangers working together like they had been a team for 30 years,” Wethal recalls.

Only later, after spotting Wethal’s backpack and key lanyard, did John- son realize she had resuscitated her classmate.

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Above: ED physician James Berbee, MD; paramedics Wes Buchholz and Paul Britain; PA students Karla Wethal and Jordan Johnson; bystander Steven Diettert.
Grad Focuses on Farmers

Brenda Balthazor, PA-C, a 2005 PA Program baccalaureate graduate, has made the health of farmers and their families a key part of her family medicine practice. Balthazor, who works at the Aspirus General Clinic in Birnamwood, Wisconsin, recently became certified in agricultural medicine through a course sponsored jointly by Iowa's Center for Agricultural Safety and Health and the Great Plains Center for Agricultural Health.

As the only provider at the clinic with such training, she encourages farmers and their families to become more aware of daily hazards, including skin conditions, chemical and respiratory exposure, and animal-transmitted diseases. She also recommends occupational changes to prevent illness and injuries.

Balthazor also precepts PA Program clinical year students and serves as a guest lecturer for the program's rural health elective. She has a master's degree in physician assistant studies from the University of Nebraska.

Adapted for Cases of Patients

Today, Wethal is in good health. She’s planning on graduating in May and hopes to practice in primary care or urgent care.

In January, her story was the basis for a Cases of Patients (CoP) presentation on acute myocardial injury management.

“Karla’s amazing willingness to be open and honest about her experience created a comfortable space in which students could ask direct questions to understand the experience of someone who has had an acute cardiac event,” remarks PA faculty Kevin Wyne, MPAS, MSc, PA-C, who directs one of several CoP throughout the PA Program curriculum.

In the presentation, students used details from Karla’s story in mock clinical encounters to discuss risk assessment, emergency management, rehabilitation options, and the primary care provider’s role in ongoing care.

The session also brought together everyone who cared for Wethal that day.

The gathering further underscored the importance of teamwork during a critical medical event—for students and caregivers, but most importantly, for Wethal.

Emergency, continued

Soon, paramedics Wes Bucholz and Paul Britain arrived to transport Wethal to UW Hospital and Clinics, where James Berbee, MD, treated her in the emergency department.

Four weeks later—after intensive care, five stents, and cardiac rehabilitation—Wethal resumed classes.

PA students MacKenzie Patterson, Brittany Alioto and Cora Gibbs (above, L-R) took home top honors at the Wisconsin Academy of Physician Assistants (WAPA) Challenge Bowl, held at WAPA’s spring meeting. Thirteen teams from five Wisconsin PA programs participated in the quiz-show–style competition.

Beasley, Students Win Awards

PA Program Medical Director John Beasley, MD, received the UW Health 2014 Patient Experience Fast Tracker Award.

The award recognized him for showing concern for patient needs, giving patients opportunities to provide input on their care and communicating in a way patients can understand.
Preceptor Q&A: James Pavlich, DO

Q: How did you start precepting?
I started precepting nearly four years ago as a favor to a friend who had a daughter studying to become a PA. I took her on as my first student, and I really enjoyed it. Now, I make myself available for all open rotations, which are usually six weeks long, and I teach three or four students per year.

Q: How does precepting work in the emergency department?
Students work the same shifts that I do. I teach as many procedural skills as possible, and we work on reading EKGs, ACLS algorithms, managing critical patients—things I don’t think they will get in other rotations.

“Students ask questions... that make me a better physician.”

The first shift is overwhelming, but by the third shift, I can let them work up a patient, do a history and physical, and come out with an assessment. It teaches students autonomy.

Q: What do you enjoy most about precepting?
I enjoy precepting because I remember what it was like to be a student. I also learn a lot: students ask questions that make me think about things in ways I’ve never approached before, and that makes me a better physician.

Q: What advice would you offer someone who’s considering precepting?
There are things that you take for granted now, that you had to learn once. If you take a little bit of time to instruct students, you take a lot of anxiety away from their future rotations, and that will make them a better practitioner in the long run.

Students Organize Career Fair

First-year PA students Beth Hartig, Dana Koehn, and Ella Rapacz (pictured above, on left, L-R) organized a health professions career fair on March 2, 2015, at the Health Sciences Learning Center. The event brought together 20 employers from Wisconsin and Minnesota (pictured above, on right) and 102 prospective job applicants from a variety of health professions and schools.

Alumni Update

After living and working in Hawaii, Erin Werner, PA-C (’12) is coming back to Madison. She’s looking forward to her new PA position at the UW Hospital and Clinics Emergency Department, where she’ll work with PA faculty Kevin Wyne, MPAS, MSc, PA-C.

We want to feature you!
Please share news, updates or accomplishments at: www.fammed.wisc.edu/pa-program/alumni-contact
We Want to Hear from You!

Please keep us up to date. Mail this form to the address below or visit www.fammed.wisc.edu/pa-program/alumni-contact. Thanks!

Name: _________________________________________________________

Name while a student: __________________________  Grad year: _____

What's your news? ______________________________________________
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What changed? □ Name □ Address □ Practice □ Email □ Other

The new information is: __________________________________________
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Send to UW–Madison PA Program, HSLC Room 1278, 750 Highland Avenue, Madison, WI 53705

fun facts

about this year's admissions

1260 applications received
111 candidates interviewed
53 students admitted

Of those invited:

30 on-campus students
10 distance education students
8 wisPACT students
5 PA/MPH dual-degree students