

# PAragon Awards

## 2008 AAPA PAragon Awards Honor Outstanding PAs

BY DAVID ASHNER

Their actions have touched the lives of thousands of patients. Their devotion to the men, women, and children they serve inspires those with whom they work and the people in their communities. They are the winners of the 2008 AAPA PAragon Awards.

This year's PAragon Award recipients will be honored at AAPA's 36th Annual PA Conference in San Antonio in May. Each winner and the first-place Publishing Award winner will be presented with a crystal obelisk and a check for \$2,500. To learn more about the awards program and how to apply for the 2009 awards, visit the AAPA Web site at [www.aapa.org/membership/awards.html](http://www.aapa.org/membership/awards.html).



### Outstanding PA of the Year

With a career that spans nearly three decades, Kathy Kemle has touched the lives of countless patients, students, and colleagues. Her impressive achievements as a clinician tell only part of her story. Her accomplishments as an educator, author of peer-reviewed articles, and organization leader are equally impressive.

After graduating from the PA program at the University of Texas Southwestern Dallas in 1979, Kemle joined the ob/gyn department at the University of Texas Medical Branch (UTMB), where she worked as a staff PA for the next six years. The native of Fort Wayne, Indiana, spent more than a decade at UTMB, including two years as a staff PA in the Department of Medicine and three more as a geriatrics coordinator. In December 1989, she left Texas and joined the staff at Albany Area Primary Health Care, Inc., in Albany, Georgia, specializing in geriatrics and long-term care. Today, she is an assistant professor of family and community medicine at the Mercer University School of Medicine, and she practices at the Family Health Center in Macon, Georgia.

Her academic career, described by her colleagues at Mercer, is "stellar." She holds academic appointments at the Medical College of Georgia, Emory University, South University, and Mercer University. She has been



Kathy Kemle

a visiting scholar in pain management at Ohio State University. Her work has been published in several medical journals, including *Annals of Long Term Care*, *Annals of Emergency Medicine*, and *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society*. She has been a featured presenter at dozens of national, regional, and state medical conferences.

Throughout her clinical and academic career, Kemle has somehow found the time to be an active leader in several state and national medical associations. She has twice served as president of the Georgia Academy of Physician Assistants and was co-founder and president of the Society of Physician Assistants Caring for the Elderly. She has been a board member of the American Academy of Home Care Physicians, the Georgia Rural Health Association, and the Georgia Geriatrics Society. After serving as treasurer of the Georgia Geriatrics Society from 2001 to 2003, she became the first PA ever to be elected president of that organization, a position she still holds. She served seven years as a delegate to AAPA's House of Delegates.

Kemle's immense value to her practice is best expressed by her supervising physician, Richard J. Ackerman, M.D., who wrote in his letter of recommendation, "If and when she retires, I'm leaving with her!"

### Humanitarian PA of the Year

Pamela Burwell graduated from the Wake Forest University School of Medicine PA Program in 1994. In the fall of 1998, one of the deadliest hurricanes on record, Hurricane Mitch, wreaked havoc on Nicaragua and Honduras, killing more than 9,000 and leaving countless more without food or shelter. Burwell volunteered in Hon-

duras in the aftermath of that storm, and her experiences there had a lasting impact on her future humanitarian efforts. Back home in Arizona, where she worked as a PA in emergency medicine, Burwell reached out to other health care professionals interested in humanitarian work, and Peacework Medical Projects was born.

In January 2001, Peacework Medical Projects made its inaugural visit to Santa Lucia, Honduras, for a two-week clinic. Burwell's team of nine medical professionals treated 1,200 patients during their first visit to the small mountain town. Each year since, Peacework has returned to Santa Lucia in January, the month when school children in Honduras are on vacation.

"The strength of Peacework Medical is that the teams return year after year to the same locations, building relationships and trust with the populations they serve," explained Donna Seton, a colleague of Burwell's. Regan Buzzelli, a PA who has volunteered with Peacework in Santa Lucia, provided some evidence of the strong bonds between the clinic and the patients: "There are even children named after a few of the volunteers."

In 2006, Burwell and Peacework opened a second clinic, this time in the southern Honduran city of Danli, where surrounding villages have little or no access to health care due to the mountainous terrain and the scarcity of basic utilities like electricity and running water. In 2007, Burwell's organization went intercontinental by opening a third clinic in Accra, Ghana. Like the original Peacework clinic in Santa Lucia, the clinics in Danli and Accra are open for two weeks at the same time each year.

All together, the three clinics treat nearly 5,000 patients, most of whom have no access to quality health care the rest of the year. In addition to primary care, the patients have access to eye exams, dental exams, psychological counseling, and even vaccinations for the families' livestock.

As director of Peacework Medical Projects, Burwell handles all administrative duties from home. These include recruiting volunteer teams, planning and hosting fund-



Pamela Burwell

raisers, and coordinating with foreign political and medical authorities to maintain credentialing privileges for her volunteers in the countries where Peacework operates. She receives no salary for her work so that 100 percent of the funds raised can be put toward the medicines and equipment used at the clinics. She does all this when she's not working at her job in the emergency department at Maryvale Hospital in Phoenix.

### Physician-PA Partnership Award

Helena C. Chui, M.D., and PA Freddi Segal-Gidan, from Downey, California, have been a team for nearly 20 years. Chui is chair of the Department of Neurology of the University of Southern California's Keck School of Medicine, while Segal-Gidan is an assistant clinical professor at Keck and director of the Alzheimer Research Center of California at Rancho Los Amigos National Rehabilitation Center.

Chui and Segal-Gidan have worked together at Rancho Los Amigos since 1989. They both graduated from Johns Hopkins University, and their specific clinical interests — neurology for Chui and gerontology for Segal-Gidan — are like two sides of the same coin when treating patients at Rancho. They frequently see elderly patients with Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease, stroke, dementia, and other neurological conditions.

Their success treating patients using the team model is evident to anyone who visits Rancho Los Amigos today. Segal-Gidan was the first PA to be hired at Rancho. In the years since, 14 additional PAs have been hired to treat a wide range of ailments. But their success extends beyond the clinic. "They do not work [together] just in the capacity of patient care, but also in administrative and teaching responsibilities," explained Arousiak Varpetian, M.D., their colleague at Rancho Los Amigos.

Both Chui and Segal-Gidan have published dozens of articles in medical journals, including *Clinical Geriatrics*, *Neurology*, and *Clinician Reviews*. They have both lectured extensively on neurological disorders at state, national, and international medical conferences, including the American Geriatrics Society, the American Academy of Neurology, and the International Conference on Alzheimer's Disease.

When they aren't presenting their research to audiences in Japan, Spain, the Netherlands, Korea, and Switzerland, Chui and Segal-Gidan share their expertise with medical, PA, nursing, and pharmacy students in California. In addition to their role on the faculty of USC's Keck School of Medicine, they supervise PA students on clinical rotations at Rancho Los Amigos. The pro-



Helena C. Chui, M.D.



Freddi Segal-Gidan