



REBECCA CALDERARA

Advanced practice provider • International Community Health Services

Rebecca Calderara, an advanced practice provider at International Community Health Services, champions equitable health care for all. ¶ She led a campaign in King County to screen, diagnose and treat 900 patients with substance use disorders for tuberculosis — providing critical testing, imaging and treatment to marginalized communities. ¶ “I believe everyone deserves access to affordable, high-quality health care — regardless of background or circumstance,” Calderara said.

You treat vulnerable people with complicated lives. Why are you drawn to this work? Early in my career, I helped build clinics in remote East African villages, which showed me how essential health care is to dignity and opportunity. I also love the diversity of community health. I’ve cared for patients from across the world, including Sudan, Tibet, Afghanistan and China, and learned so much from their cultural knowledge and experiences.

What personal experience drew you to the quest to eliminate latent tuberculosis? I joined a CDC-



funded project to improve TB testing and latent TB treatment in primary care, in partnership with the King County Tuberculosis Control Program. What started as a professional opportunity quickly became something deeply meaningful. I was stunned to learn that TB remains the world’s deadliest infectious disease and one in four people globally carry latent TB.

What do you get out of mentoring nurses and others who are new to community health? I’m inspired by the insight and dedication newer team members bring, and I value the shared learning that happens every day. I’ve also benefited from exceptional mentorship, especially from Dr. Masa Narita and Dr. Yoseph Sorri at the King County Tuberculosis Control Program. ... Their example showed me the power of mentorship, and I’m committed to passing that forward.

How do you recharge after an intense workday? I enjoy running, hiking and skiing. I also paint and do some terrible gardening with very little harvesting.

– Brooke Strickland, contributing writer

CURTIS ELKO

Pharmacist and certified poison information specialist • Washington Poison Center

When he was a pharmacy student, Curtis Elko had a four-week rotation at a poison center. It sparked a 30-year career in toxicology. ¶ Now a certified specialist at Washington Poison Center, he guides patients and health care providers through exposures to hazardous substances. A dedicated preceptor, he’s inspired future pharmacists along the way. ¶ “We are best thought of as guides, helping to steer events for our fellow humans,” Elko said.

Why did you choose this line of work? Learning about local toxic plants, mushrooms and venomous animals was part of my early life on a small farm in rural Ohio, including a close call with a honeybee sting. Soon after, I discovered that desensitization treatments with that same bee venom could make me immune to the next sting. As a pharmacist, I appreciate the natural origins of medicine, although toxicity always held the greater fascination for me. Working at the poison center seemed like a natural fit and has become part of my life’s work.

What have you learned about yourself by



mentoring and training pharmacy students?

I have found that toxicology is a shared experience. The interaction with beginning students keeps me grounded but has also allowed me to grow.

What have you learned about the human condition from the experiences you’ve had?

Humans are born out of a world of chemicals: Some are of our own making and some cause more harm than good. Yet through all the potential harm, we survive, evolve and adapt to our chemical nature.

Who was your most important mentor? My parents were my first and most important mentors, but my high school science teacher would be a close second. I and many others were fortunate to have as a mentor Dr. William Robertson, the first medical director of the Washington Poison Center. But, there have been countless more. Perhaps these mentors, past and present, inspired me to help students wherever I could.

– Brooke Strickland, contributing writer