



## **\$40,000 Beard Award presented to newly graduated physician assistant**

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**AUGUSTA, Ga.** (May 13, 2024) – Kendrick De Castro is a compassionate caregiver who puts patients first.

“Kendrick anticipates patients’ needs and goes above and beyond to make their medical care as comfortable as possible. He shows sincere care and interest, and holds the patient as the priority,” said Melania Velasquez, a physician assistant at [Wellstar MCG Health](#) who taught De Castro and worked alongside him during his OB/GYN rotation.

Augusta University President [Brooks A. Keel](#), PhD, presented De Castro with the [John F. Beard Award](#) during Augusta University’s spring graduate commencement ceremony on May 9. The \$40,000 Beard Award, funded by philanthropists William Porter “Billy” Payne and his wife, Martha, is presented annually to a graduating [College of Allied Health Sciences](#), [Medical College of Georgia](#), [College of Nursing](#) or [Graduate School](#) student who exemplifies caring and compassion in health care.

“Kendrick’s friendly, genuine bedside manner has earned him the adoration of many patients, and his professional and caring connection to patients has eased patient reservations and also comforted children through traumatic procedures,” said [Elizabeth Prince-Coleman](#), program director and assistant professor in the [Physician Assistant Department](#) in the College of Allied Health Sciences. “He goes beyond the expectations of a student in clinical services, offering help with patient transport; ensuring routine care like IV removal does not interfere with quality-of-life needs such as meal time; and writing down medication names for patients – unsolicited – to help them navigate the pharmacy.”

De Castro, who is from the metro Atlanta area, earned his Bachelor of Science in Biology from Georgia State University before coming to AU. He is a licensed pharmacy technician and is proficient in English, Spanish and Tagalog, a Filipino language.

“Kendrick works diligently with the student volunteer clinics to serve populations often marginalized in our society and health care system. He works to understand the challenges patients face not only with medical symptoms, but also the barriers to better health from other aspects of their lives,” said Prince-Coleman.

De Castro can often be found volunteering at those clinics, including the Equality Clinic, Faithcare Clinic and Clínica Latina.

“Kendrick’s actions and interactions with patients reflect a genuine concern for their physical, social and emotional well-being,” said Tiana Brown, [Clínica Latina](#) coordinator. “He has a unique gift for making patients feel heard and valued in the medical decision-making process, and he connects with them on a personal level.”

Beyond his interactions with patients, De Castro has created a culture of care and compassion among his cohort.

“Kendrick emerged as the light and the compass of our class,” said classmate Ellie Pontiakos. “He would go out of his way to send uplifting messages each day to the group. He provided positivity and comfort in a period of newness and anxiety.”

Amber A. Garrett, another classmate in the PA program, agreed.

“From the start, Kendrick embodied extraordinary character, marked by authenticity, compassion and kindness. Within the first week of knowing him, our cohort made the unanimous decision to appoint him as our class president, a role he has embraced with unwavering dedication,” Garrett said.

As class president, De Castro served as the liaison between faculty and his classmates and provided support to his cohort. From his daily messages to his ability to relate to anyone, De Castro has been a pillar of support for his patients and classmates alike.

“His ability to prioritize the needs of others above his own, even in the midst of adversity, speaks volumes about his character and commitment to compassionate service,” said [Amanda Breeden](#), an assistant professor and De Castro’s academic adviser.

“Kendrick will be a great blessing to his future patients, not only in the care and compassion he provides directly to them, but also in the care and compassion I know he will invest in the entire team around him,” said Prince-Coleman, who was recognized with the Beard award in 2015.

The Beard Award was established in 1998 by Payne, the immediate past chairman of the Augusta National Golf Club, in memory of his father-in-law, who died of cancer in 1997. The award honors President Emeritus Francis J. Tedesco, MD, and Beard’s physician, Mark F. Williams, MD, a 1988 MCG graduate who treated Beard during his hospitalization.

This is the second consecutive year that a graduate in the College of Allied Health Sciences has earned this prestigious recognition.

[Download a photo](#) of AU President Brooks A. Keel, PhD, and Kendrick De Castro.

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