

ALUMNA SPOTLIGHT

BARBARA TERRAZAS

NURTURING THE SAFETY NET

By Linda Anderberg



Barbara Terrazas, M.P.H. '76, is a big picture person with big ideas.

"I consider challenges as gifts—opportunities to bring light to situations that seem insurmountable," she says. This is evident in her drive to bring quality, culturally competent health care to those in need, such as the uninsured. Her passion for her work is partly inspired by her own experience as a breast cancer survivor.

Terrazas makes a compelling case for the inestimable value of our health safety net, and she has dedicated her career to serving this cause at the international, national, statewide, and community levels. She currently serves as the director of planning, development, and policy at Tiburcio Vasquez Health Center, a community clinic offering primary medical care for residents of southern Alameda County.

"There is an infrastructure already in existence for the implementation of aid for the health care of poor people, and that is the community clinics," she says. "We're doing more, with high quality, for less."

Before she became a nurturer of the health safety net, Terrazas relied on it—bringing her daughter to the local clinic while she earned her M.P.H. in health administration and planning at the School of Public Health. She also worked on a health manpower recruitment project with five Bay Area community clinics, exposing undergraduates to the realities of practicing medicine and encouraging them to give back by serving the people in their communities. Terrazas regularly encounters many of these former students serving as doctors and health professionals today.

"When I was working on the Health Recruitment Project, ultimately what I ended up doing was recruiting myself," she says.

This might have been her finest recruiting achievement, because Terrazas has spent more than 30 years developing her organizational development, strategic planning, and policy skills to the benefit of community health organizations. As director of affiliate relations and planning for the American Lung Association of California, she oversaw 21 local affiliate organizations and helped develop the association's first strategic plan in 1982. She served as the CEO of Catholic Charities of Alameda/Contra Costa—the largest social service provider in the East Bay—for 10 years. She has also worked as vice president of regional operations at "Just Say No" International and executive director for La Clinica de la Raza.

Now at Tiburcio Vasquez, Terrazas feels she has come full circle. "I'm doing a combination of planning, development, and policy," she explains. "We're trying to be as responsive as much as we can to the needs of the community. And making sure we're filling that void as a safety net."

The recent influx in clinic clients—Terrazas believes their requests for service have tripled in the last year—speaks to both the clinic's success in serving the community and the continuing need for those

services. "The good side to this is I think there is an increase in patients because people know that they can get quality care here and it will be culturally competent," says Terrazas. "It's friendly. And that's critical."

Terrazas also believes the increase is in part due to rising levels of people who have no other access to health care: the uninsured and working poor. To meet the demands for service, Terrazas has once again turned to recruitment of community members. She has helped develop the Promotoras de Salud volunteer corps: about 20 women, primarily stay-at-home mothers, who meet with community families to share information, give advice, and promote a message of good health. "We've created a very innovative grassroots program," she says, "We're coming full circle, training clients to be the actual advocates of their health care." Terrazas plans to take Promotoras volunteers with her on a trip to Washington, D.C., in March to serve as spokespersons.

Terrazas also lends her considerable health management expertise back to the School as a member of the Policy Advisory Council. "The School has been phenomenally instrumental in training people who work at the safety net level," she says. One of her goals is to ensure that the School continues to support and improve community-based health. [6](#)

—Linda Anderberg