

College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences

A publication to keep YOU informed

Winter 2008 Volume 2, Issue 2

Students Begin Journey to Become Physician Assistants

On January 11, the first White Coat Ceremony was held for the 26 members of the inaugural class of the Physician Assistant (PA) Program. This was the first step toward becoming a member of this distinguished healthcare profession. The White Coat Ceremony symbolizes the commitment to professionalism and underscores the core values of the College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences, which has as its hallmark, professional service through leadership, respect, integrity and caring.

Dr. Charles W. Wickliffe, vice chairman of the Fuqua Heart Center at Piedmont, was the featured speaker. Dr. Wickliffe is also on the Board of Directors of The Center for Health and Learning, which is a partnership between Piedmont Healthcare and Mercer University established to create joint initiatives in the areas of nursing, pharmacy, research and other medical and allied health education programs. Dr. Wickliffe has been a strong advocate of Mercer's Physician Assistant Program. He has worked with physician assistants in his practice and promotes their role in today's integrated health care system.



Mr. Bradford Schwarz, Director of the Physician Assistant Program, read the names of the PA Class of 2010 while faculty members Patricia Kelly, Nadja Vawryk Button, and Ami Robinson presented the white coats to each student. Dr. Philip S. Brachman, Medical Director for the PA Program, lead the students as they recited the Professional Oath. Dr. Ben Taylor, president of the Georgia Association of Physician Assistants, gave a special welcome from the association.

Dean's Message



Our President, William D. Underwood, has articulated a vision that states within the next 10 years, Mercer University will become counted among the leading private universities in the Southeast, along with Vanderbilt, Emory, Duke, Wake Forest, and Tulane. To achieve this aspiration, the University has developed ten year goals, and the colleges/schools within the University were asked to develop strategies to support those goals. In this Dean's Message, I present the strategy and action steps developed to address the goal of attracting and retaining increasingly qualified professional students.

We presently have highly qualified students with an entering grade point average (GPA) of 3.40, an average Pharmacy College Admissions Test (PCAT) of 80, and almost 61% with a prior bachelor's degree. We set a strategy to further increase the credentials of our student body. The action steps that we will implement to bring this strategy to fruition are 1) increase the entering GPA of students to 3.60; 2) increase average PCAT score to 85; 3) all entering students will have a minimum of 90 hours of pre-pharmacy credit; 4) all entering merit scholarship recipients will receive funding equal to at least 25% of tuition; 5) increase scholarships for returning students by \$150,000; and 6) select entering students that would represent a national applicant pool.

The previously stated action steps are rather ambitious; however, I believe they can all be achieved within the next decade. After all, students represent the life blood of an academic institution, and we have a responsibility to recruit the best and brightest who ultimately will bring honor to our institution and profession.

Sincerely,

H. W. "Ted" Matthews
Dean and Vice President for the Health Sciences

AAPS Elects Banga as Fellow in Recognition of Research in Drug Delivery



Faculty member and researcher Ajay K. Banga, Ph.D., was honored at the 2007 Annual Meeting of the American Association of Pharmaceutical Scientists (AAPS) in San Diego, California. Faculty and graduate students also made 18 scientific presentations at the national meeting.

Dr. Banga, professor and chair of Department of Pharmaceutical Sciences, was elected to Fellowship status by AAPS. The national association confers the honor of Fellow to recognize individuals for outstanding contributions that elevate the stature of the pharmaceutical sciences and for professional excellence in the field relevant to the mission of the association. Dr.

Banga was formally recognized at the awards ceremony of the Opening Session on November 11.

His nomination, which was supported by letters from AAPS Fellows who are recognized experts in drug delivery, stated, "Undoubtedly, Dr. Banga [has] attained international recognition as a leader in transdermal drug delivery (delivery of drugs via a skin patch), and his laboratory is one of the very few in the world with such expertise and recognition."

In his research, Dr. Banga focuses on non-traditional methods of transdermal delivery, such as the use of a small electric field to push charged drug molecules through the skin, including insulin, monoclonal antibodies or vaccines, or other approaches. *(continued on page 3)*

Research Highlights

The Georgia Research Alliance awarded a Collaboration Planning Grant to Dr. Martin D'Souza and Dr. Ravi Palaniappan, both faculty in the College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences Center for Drug Delivery Research (CDDR), for "Evaluation of an Oral Encapsulated Melanoma Tumor Vaccine." The \$50,000 grant received by Mercer and Emory University, of which Mercer gets \$35,000, will enable the collaborators to develop and test the efficacy of melanoma vaccine formulations by a novel method of administering vaccines -by the oral route.

Dr. D'Souza, a member of the Nanotechnology Cancer & Vaccine Laboratory in the CDDR, has worked on the development of novel oral vaccines for a number of vaccine candidates such as typhoid, tuberculosis, hepatitis B and melanoma. By using the patented technology to prepare nanospheres and microspheres, Dr. D'Souza can encapsulate more than one antigen in a single vaccine microparticle. In particular, a vaccine will be produced against a mouse model of melanoma, which mimics certain human skin cancers.

Dr. Ravi Palaniappan also received a three-year NIH R-15 grant totaling \$219,315 to formulate oral vaccines and study the mucosal immune response and adjuvant effect of microspheres. The NIH funded Pneumonia vaccine formulation: PsaA and PspC protein vaccines, which are developed by CDC and UAB (currently in Phase I clinical trials), are formulated using microspheres for oral vaccines.

Dr. Palaniappan currently manages the Mucosal Proteomics Lab of the CDDR where there is special emphasis on Vaccine formulations for Prostate cancer vaccine and Pneumonia protein vaccines in collaboration with CDC, Emory, and the University of Alabama at Birmingham.



Pictured left to right are Dr. Ravi Palaniappan and Dr. Martin D'Souza.

Alumni Notables

Pamala Marquess, Pharm.D. `93, was appointed to the American Pharmaceutical Association Committee on Nominations 2008.

William M. Leake, BSPHM `73, was inducted as president of the Kentucky Board of Pharmacy in January.

Jannifer J. Johnson, Pharm.D. `94, received AstraZeneca Dave Haack Award, the most prestigious awarded in Scientific Affairs. This award is presented annually to a Scientific Affairs member who has demonstrated leadership, a commitment to excellence, a reverence to the discipline of science, collegiality and acceptance of everything "team" stands for, a sincerity and genuineness in their interactions, and an infectious sense of humor, all which are consistent with the example Dave Haack established during his time with AstraZeneca.

Valerie Prince, Pharm.D. `93, BCPS, FAPhA, received the APhA-ASP Linwood B. Tice Award (formerly known as the APhA Friend of ASP Award). This award recognizes an individual whose long term services and contributions have benefited the APhA Academy of Student Pharmacists, and thereby pharmacy students in general.

Johnnie L. Early, BSPHM `73, was installed as chairman of the National Pharmaceutical Association (NPhA) Foundation Board. The National Pharmaceutical Association is dedicated to representing the views and ideas of minority pharmacists on critical issues affecting health care and pharmacy, as well as advancing the standards of pharmaceutical care among all practitioners.

Laura "Gena" Tyson, Pharm.D. `91, recently opened Dogwood Pharmacy in Nashville, Georgia.

Congratulations to all
of our alumni!

Banga Named Fellow

(continued from page 2)

His laboratory, which includes 11 Ph.D. students, a post-doctoral fellow and a research coordinator, has received more than 50 grants and contracts from industry to date.

He serves on the Scientific Advisory Board of two companies and as a consultant to several companies. Dr. Banga is the editor in chief of the journal *Critical Reviews in Therapeutic Drug Carrier Systems* as well as a member of editorial boards for three other journals. He has been a referee for more than 28 journals.

He is the author of two books, *Therapeutic Peptides and Proteins: Formulation, Processing, and Delivery Systems*, Second Edition and *Electrically Assisted Transdermal and Topical Drug Delivery*, which are widely used reference texts in the pharmaceutical/ biotechnology industry.

Banga joined Mercer in 1999, after serving eight years on the faculty of Auburn University. At Mercer, he has been recognized for excellence as a researcher and educator.

Students Spend Holidays on Uganda Mission Trip

Several Pharm.D. students traveled abroad during their holiday vacation to work with troubled teens and children at a place called Dwelling House in Uganda. The Dwelling House is designed to help those who have been affected by a recent civil war or the AIDS epidemic transition to a more normal life. Dean Matthews said, "I am very proud of our students who spent their holiday vacation serving the less fortunate. This mission trip underscores, in a real way, the core values of our College."



CPFI President Whitney Deal (right) poses with Dwelling House resident, Christene, and her son, Pete

The group, comprised of nine students, two Mercer alumni and two friends of group members, spent 10 days working at the Dwelling House and learning more about the culture in Uganda. The experience for Whitney Deal, a third-year student and president of the student chapter of Christian Fellowship International, Inc. (CPFI), was unforgettable. Although Ms. Deal has gone on mission trips closer to home — including New York City, and more recently, New Orleans, to help with Hurricane Katrina relief — she is drawn to Africa. "I really don't know how to explain it," she said. "Talking about Africa ... there's something strange and mysterious about the people there. They don't have much, but they seem happier and have so much more joy (than people in the United States). There's an attraction to these people."

The group met on a regular basis to prepare for the trip by gathering supplies and learning about the children and teens they would be working with. They took some much needed items, such as sheets and clothes, as well as some toys and candy, to Uganda. The items were donated by fellow students, faculty, staff, churches and families of the student volunteers.

Some of the students who took the trip shared their experiences during a lunchtime presentation in February. Everyone was moved by the events that took place and encouraged by the wonderful testimonies about the trip.

In Memoriam

We are sad to report that Dr. Bernard G. Keller, Jr. died February 2, 2008. He was a former chair of the Department of Pharmacy Administration in our pharmacy program.



The group takes time for photo. Pictured are (left to right): Cimeon Koebel, Evan Nix, Jay Page (Air Force Academy student), Amanda Karwisch, Amanda Woodward (Mercer Macon alum), Whitney Deal, Ashley Patrick, Nadege Aurubin, Scarlett Holcomb (COPHS alum), Chloe Ledferd, Brian Keys, Earnest Womack (Morehouse College alum), and Tanea Chane.

Ragsdale Garners Awards

Carolyn Perry Ragsdale, a third-year pharmacy student, was one of 28 pharmacy students to be awarded a scholarship for the 2007-2008 academic year by the National Community Pharmacists Association (NCPA) Foundation. The scholarships, totaling \$57,000, were awarded during the National Community Pharmacist Association's 109th Annual Convention and Trade Exposition held October 13-17 in Anaheim, California.

Carolyn also was the recent recipient of the 2007-2008 American Society of Health-System Pharmacists (ASHP) Student Leadership Award. Twelve students were chosen from 92 applicants nationwide. Carolyn received a recognition plaque, an ASHP drug information reference library (valued at \$900) and a cash award of \$2,500 from the ASHP Research and Education Foundation.



Students and alumni attend the 5th Annual Eastern AMCP Student Chapter Conference in Chattanooga, Tenn. Pictured are: (Back row, from left to right) Will Andersen, Adrian Washington (alumni), Ebony Blue, Setor Lotsu, Miheret Tesfaye, Tina Resakhani, Jason Montegna, Mindy La, Chip Robinson (alumni) and (Front Row, left to right) Brian Keys, Shobhna Butler (alumni/faculty), Dominic McCormick, Kristine Smile, Tanea Chane, and Mary Cooper (alumni).

Dean Inspires CPFI

Dean Ted Matthews greeted and addressed the student chapter for Christian Fellowship



International, Inc. (CPFI). The group looks forward to Dean Matthews' annual inspirational message.

This year, Dean Matthews gave the group some food for thought and related to them a message on "Trusting God Beyond What You Can See." "Remember what God has done for you in the past so you can deal with your present trials," Dean Matthews reminded the group.

CPFI president Whitney Deal stated, "We always enjoy Dean Matthews and hearing his inspiring words."

We Want To Hear From You

We Want To Hear From You

Have You:

- Changed jobs?
- Married?
- Moved?
- Added to your family?
- Received an award or other recognition?

Tell Us About It!

Name _____
First Middle Maiden Last

Home Address _____

Email address _____

Company _____

Title _____

Class of _____

Tell us how we can better stay connected to you.

Send suggestions and news items to:

**COPHS
Dean's Office
3001 Mercer University Drive
Atlanta, GA 30341**

or to

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Photos must be jpg or pdf format

This e-newsletter is designed to keep alumni and friends informed of recent news and activities and will be distributed during the months that the annual report and Mercer Health are not published.



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William D. Underwood, J.D.**



IMPORTANT DATES

**Class of 2009 Pinning Ceremony
May 1**

**Last Day of Class
May 2**

**Commencement
May 3**