



# WELCOMING *the* WORLD

*How the School of Pharmacy hosted  
3 international conferences in 3 weeks*



BY MALISSA CARROLL



It's a warm spring morning in Baltimore on May 19. Traffic picks up on the Westside as faculty and staff across the University of Maryland, Baltimore (UMB) make their way to work. The campus is quieter than usual, having just celebrated convocation for the Class of 2014 and the end of the spring semester the previous Friday. Yet, the University of Maryland School of Pharmacy continues to buzz with excitement.

Ruth McLean-Foster, coordinator in the Department of Pharmaceutical Sciences (PSC), walks hurriedly across Pharmacy Hall's atrium. Having arrived in the early morning, she continues to make final preparations for the first of three international conferences that will be held in the building during the next three weeks. More than 200 researchers from around the world are due to arrive at any moment.

## AN INTERNATIONAL STAGE

The School of Pharmacy is no stranger to international audiences. One of the country's top-ranked pharmacy schools, it has welcomed educators, researchers, and students from countries such as South Korea, Saudi Arabia, Paraguay, and Costa Rica, who sought to learn more about how it stays on the cutting-edge of pharmacy practice and pharmaceutical research.

Visitors are drawn to the School's state-of-the-art educational, practice, and research facilities, including Pharmacy Hall Addition, which opened in 2010. This extensive renovation added more than 66,000 net square feet to the School and includes all of the tools and resources needed to educate and train the next generation of pharmacists and pharmaceutical researchers.

"Pharmacy Hall Addition truly transformed the School of Pharmacy into a thriving center for professional and graduate education, pharmaceutical care and research, and community engagement," says Natalie D. Eddington, PhD '89, BSP, FAAPS, FCP, dean and professor of the School and executive director of University Regional Partnerships. "The lecture halls, some of which seat up to 200 people and are equipped with distance-learning technology, and expanded research and pharmacy practice laboratories have given us much-needed space, allowing us to welcome and share our expertise with members of the global community."

Faculty members are also internationally renowned in their fields. Their innovative practice and research activities attract pharmacy practitioners and researchers from around the world. "The expertise of our faculty members invigorates the practice and research initiatives of researchers worldwide," adds Eddington.

Seeing an opportunity to leverage these advantages, PSC professors Audra Stinchcomb, PhD, and Edward Moreton, PhD, and Magaly Rodriguez de Bittner, PharmD '83, BCPS, CDE, FAPhA, professor and chair of the Department of Pharmacy Practice and Science (PPS), spearheaded plans to bring three large international conferences to the School in spring 2014.

Although these conferences would provide unprecedented exposure for the School's educational and scientific achievements, there was a catch — all of the conferences were scheduled within a three-week span. This provided a huge challenge — albeit one that faculty and staff were prepared to conquer.

## ON POINT WITH MICRONEEDLES

Not long after McLean-Foster finished her preparations on May 19, the atrium began to buzz with the conversations of more than 200 researchers from 25 countries as they arrived for



International Conference on Microneedles

the Third International Conference on Microneedles.

"Since the Second International Conference on Microneedles in 2012, it has been exciting to watch this field grow in both the quantity as well as quality of research," says Stinchcomb, who led the international committee tasked with planning the conference.

"With an astonishing 77 percent of our audience visiting from outside of the United States, this is truly an international conference," she adds. "And it was wonderful to be able to hold it at the School of Pharmacy, where we showcased the achievements of research faculty and highlighted our stellar research facilities."

Microneedles are microscopic needles that can be applied to the skin on a patch. Often used to draw blood or deliver drugs, they are a rapidly growing area of interest in transdermal drug delivery. The Third International Conference on Microneedles showcased the latest international developments in microneedle technology and applications and provided a forum for interdisciplinary communication and collaboration.

"Attending this conference has been an amazing experience," says Bing Cai, a graduate student from Uppsala University in Sweden. "I'm new to this area of research, so this was a great opportunity to learn what other researchers are doing and network with a number of remarkable individuals."

The conference featured keynote lectures that spotlighted the use of microneedles in drug and vaccine delivery, microneedle-based sensors, and skin biomechanics. In addition to posters and presentations highlighting recent developments in the design and technology of microneedles, Stinchcomb presented her research on microneedle-enhanced transdermal drug delivery. A true entrepreneur, she spoke about leveraging her work to establish pharmaceutical companies that specialize in transdermal drug delivery products.

The conference, which was sponsored by PermeGear, Inc., Lohmann Therapie-Systeme AG, Inovio Pharmaceuticals, Inc.,

the American Association of Pharmaceutical Scientists, and the School of Pharmacy, included a reception at the National Aquarium in Baltimore to welcome attendees to the city.

“I’ve been fortunate to attend all three International Conferences on Microneedles,” says Laurence Hayward, venture capitalist and board member of 10x Technology, located in Libertyville, Ill. “Each conference has been excellent, and I have been fascinated by the quality and quantity of the discoveries presented.”

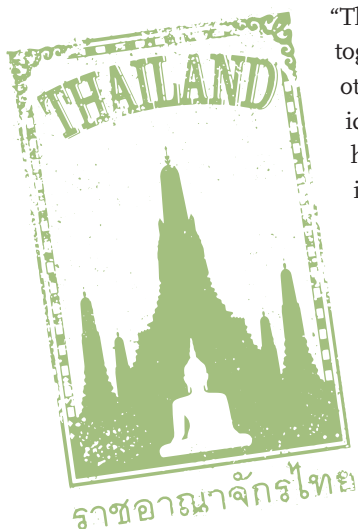
## AN ‘EX-THAI-ORDINARY’ COLLABORATION

Just nine days after the three-day microneedles conference began, McLean-Foster repeated her preparations alongside Moreton and other staff members, preparing to welcome nearly 120 faculty, staff, and students from pharmacy schools across the United States and Thailand to the 20th anniversary conference of the U.S.-Thai Consortium for the Development of Pharmacy Education in Thailand, which kicked off on May 28.

“It was a pleasure to host the U.S.-Thai Consortium for the Development of Pharmacy Education in Thailand at the School of Pharmacy,” says Moreton, a member of the consortium’s steering committee and head of the local planning committee. “This year’s conference represented a great opportunity to celebrate not only 20 years of collaboration, but also 20 years of friendship.”

Established in 1994, the consortium fosters a formal link among participating institutions to help enhance their academic, research, and clinical programs. It currently includes 16 schools of pharmacy in the U.S. and the American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy (AACCP), as well as 19 schools of pharmacy in Thailand and the Committee for Pharmacy Manpower Development in the Thailand Ministry of University Affairs.

“The consortium allows us to come together with our colleagues from the other side of the world to share our ideas and successes, as well as discuss how we can further improve the quality of education for student pharmacists not only in Thailand, but in the United States as well,” says Melody Ryan, PharmD, MPH, associate professor in the Department of Pharmacy Practice and Science at the University of Kentucky College of Pharmacy and co-chair of the consortium’s steering committee.



U.S.-Thai Consortium

Sponsored by the School of Pharmacy and AACCP, the conference reflected on the consortium’s past achievements as participants worked to develop a plan for its future. Several School faculty and staff members — including Heather Congdon, PharmD, CACP, CDE, associate professor in PPS and assistant dean for the School at the Universities at Shady Grove; Robert Beardsley, PhD, MS, professor and vice chair for administration in the Department of Pharmaceutical Health Services Research; and Lisa Lebovitz, JD, assistant dean for academic affairs and assessment — shared information about their current practice, research, and educational initiatives.

“This partnership has helped to strengthen the scholarship of pharmacy students from both Thailand and the United States. With all that we have learned, I believe that our university is strong enough to lead pharmacy education not only in Thailand, but in the surrounding countries as well,” says Sindhchai Keokitichai, PhD, dean of Burapha University and a founding member of the consortium.

## ADVANCING PHARMACY ACROSS THE AMERICAS

The IX Pan American Conference on Pharmaceutical Education wrapped up the third week of international conferences at the School of Pharmacy. Rodriguez de Bittner’s “right-hand woman,” Lisa Calvert Chalk, operations manager in PPS, joined several other members of the department’s dedicated staff on June 2, awaiting the arrival of more than 90 delegates, presenters, and participants from 35 countries across the Americas who gathered to promote cooperation among pharmacy schools.

“The IX Pan American Conference on Pharmaceutical



Education allows representatives from schools of pharmacy across the Americas to share their experiences and move pharmacy education forward in the region,” says Rodriguez de Bittner. “The guidelines that we have developed have been used by many countries to ensure their student pharmacists receive the best education and are prepared to work in one of the most dynamic health professions.”

Sponsored by the School, AACP, the Pan American Health Organization, and the Ministry of Health in Brazil, the three-day conference featured presentations and panel discussions that highlighted innovative methodologies for pharmacy education and evaluation.

Jay A. Perman, MD, president of UMB, delivered the keynote presentation, which spotlighted the importance of interprofessional education (IPE) and showcased several interprofessional initiatives underway at the University.

“In the past, health care providers were trained to think only about the individual patient,” says Perman. “While the individual patient should continue to be our focus, we must now also examine the population in which these individuals reside to better understand the nature of their illnesses. However, understanding population health requires a team.”

As co-director of UMB’s Center for Interprofessional Education, Congdon echoed Perman’s message, providing advice about how to incorporate IPE activities into a pharmacy education curriculum. As the School’s “accreditation all-star,” Lebovitz participated in a panel discussion about methods participants could employ to evaluate the effectiveness of their institutions’ pharmacy education curriculum.

In addition to tours of the School’s educational facilities, attendees were treated to a Taste of Baltimore luncheon to officially welcome them to the “Greatest City in America.”

“The School of Pharmacy and Dr. Rodriguez de Bittner welcomed us to this conference as warmly as if we were at home,” says Andres Amarillo, who represented schools of pharmacy in Paraguay. “It is now our responsibility to continue the mission of this conference when we return home, and work to strengthen understanding of pharmacists’ expertise and the pharmacy profession across the region.”

## IT TAKES A VILLAGE

As the fourth oldest pharmacy school in the United States, the University of Maryland School of Pharmacy has led pharmacy education, scientific discovery, patient care, and community engagement across the state of Maryland and beyond for more than 170 years.

But exactly how far “beyond” the state of Maryland does the School’s impact extend? If these three conferences are any indication, it reaches quite far — globally, in fact.

Despite the challenges that hosting three international conferences within three weeks presented, faculty and staff at the School joined forces to ensure that each event operated smoothly and that attendees made the most of their time in Baltimore, planning special events to introduce them to local culture or cuisine.

“The faculty and staff who dedicated their time and energy to planning and executing these conferences exceeded expectations,” says Eddington. “I commend them for organizing fantastic events that brought international attention to the School’s education, practice, and research initiatives and reaffirmed our commitment to fostering partnerships with members of our global community.” 🌐



IX Pan American Conference