



Felitto & Wheeler Named 2010 Preceptors of the Year

By: Rebecca DeSousa and Kristina Kiley

On the evening of October 28, 2010, pharmacists and other professionals gathered at St. Clements Castle in Portland, Connecticut for the 9th Annual Preceptor Appreciation Dinner. Donald J. Felitto, M.D., and Kathryn Wheeler, Pharm.D., were presented with the Dennis J. Chapron Preceptor of the Year awards.

Dennis Chapron, M.S., namesake of the award, was an associate professor at the School of Pharmacy for 34 years. During his tenure, he received the School of Pharmacy Teacher of the Year Award as well as the Preceptor of the Year award on more than one occasion. His areas of professional interest include drug disposition and response in the elderly and mechanistic investigations into drug-drug interactions and clinical problem solving in geriatrics.

Dr. Felitto practices nephrology, an internal study of the kidneys, at Southeastern Connecticut Nephrology Associates in Uncasville, Connecticut. He is one of six doctors in this private practice, which generally caters to adults with chronic kidney and hypertension problems. Dr. Felitto's rotation allows students to see a unique part of medicine. Nephrology requires a highly specific course of study and is not



Dr. Donald Felitto [left] is presented the 2010 Preceptor of the Year Award by Associate Professor Emeritus Dennis Chapron.

discussed extensively in the UConn School of Pharmacy curriculum. As such, students are able to learn comprehensively about a new subject area while still applying skills learned in their pharmacy classes.

Dr. Felitto received his B.S. in Pharmacy at St. John's University, completed medical school in Tampico, Mexico, and finished his medical training at New York Medical College. He became interested in nephrology as a medical student on rotation. "People were promoting me to pursue a residency or a fellowship. They encouraged me to try nephrology, and I liked it," Dr. Felitto commented.

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A Message from the Director

The Office of Experiential Education (OEE) is continually trying to expand the number and diversity of the types of pharmacy practice experiences offered to our UConn pharmacy students. Since the practice of pharmacy is constantly changing we feel it is our obligation to respond to these changes and prepare our students for future practice environments. Many of you have been very inspiring and creative in offering our pharmacy students many new and unique experiential learning opportunities. We could not have done this without all of you participating in our experiential education programs.

I want to take this opportunity to share with you one of the unique Introductory Pharmacy Practice Experiences (IPPE) in which our UConn students participated during this past year. These activities have a tremendous impact on our students and the communities that they serve. Many of these experiences were accomplished with the help and dedication of health care providers, especially pharmacists, across our state. As part of a land grant institution the UConn School of Pharmacy understands our obligation to the residents of the State of Connecticut and to educate our students to give back to their communities.

As many of you are aware inappropriate medication use in elderly patients has been linked to a large number of adverse drug

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Preceptors of the Year

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His rotation is unique in the attention he gives to his students, as he takes one student on one-month rotations. His students are assigned a project, expected to conduct research, and allowed to interview patients prior to their examination. Students are eventually able to examine the patients as well, reconciling medications and recommending changes. "Students are able to witness the thought process that goes into prescribing medication, considering adverse effects," said Dr. Felitto.

Dr. Felitto was honored to receive the Preceptor of the Year Award. "It was a surprise because you never think people are watching you," said Dr. Felitto. Christopher Cardoni, one of the students who nominated Dr. Felitto for the award said, "Dr. Felitto's commitment to teaching is unstoppable. He is always teaching and thoroughly enjoys having pharmacy students with him." His students admire him for his commitment to the program and the unique medical perspective his rotation provides.

Dr. Wheeler, the second recipient of the award, is an assistant clinical professor of pharmacy practice at the University of Connecticut, and practices as a medication safety pharmacist at the William W. Backus Hospital in Norwich, Connecticut. Her responsibilities at Backus include receiving quality data and trending reports. The reports are brought to committees who make changes on how to make the hospital a safer place for both the patients and the employees.

After completing her B.S. in biology at Boston College, she earned her Pharm.D. at Massachusetts College of Pharmacy and Allied Health Sciences. Upon completion of her studies she became a pharmacist at William W. Backus, where she has been a preceptor for the last seven years.

As a preceptor, she supervises two general medicine students and one medication safety student per rotation. As explained by Dr. Wheeler, "the general medicine students do rounds in the morning and then meet in the afternoon to discuss the patient and his or her care. The medication safety student assists me with my duties, such as trending data." In addition, her rotation allows the students to gain a unique experience of pharmacy by observing various procedures, such as angioplasty.

"My role as preceptor allows me to learn things in new ways," said Dr. Wheeler. It also provides unique benefits for students that are not found in the classroom. "There's nothing like hands-on experience. It requires direct application of knowledge and knowing how to use their knowledge and applying it to each patient individually," commented Dr. Wheeler.

A general medicine rotation student who nominated Dr. Wheeler said, "The rotation helped bring classroom knowledge into practice and application. She worked us hard, with a variety of assignments, but she always made herself available for feedback, questions, and follow up."

Dr. Wheeler was honored to win the award. "A good preceptor is someone who has clinical knowledge they are able to share and break down so students can understand it. The students appreciate it when you treat them as professionals and demonstrate how this translates into a life for them."

Both Dr. Felitto and Dr. Wheeler are immense assets to the experiential education program, as their commitment to teaching the relevant and intricate details of the practices allow for only the strongest students to emerge from the program. Their efforts are greatly appreciated and invaluable to the students. ■

Students Get On the Bus

By: Ryan McLean

Every year between November 15th and December 31st, University of Connecticut School of Pharmacy students can be observed in Medicare Part D plan selection projects helping seniors choose their drug plans, including working on the state's Medicare Bus. The Medicare Part D bus is not a drug dispensary, but a mobile office that distributes vital information for the medication coverage of its recipients via plan finder software. P3 and P4 students get involved in the effort to help seniors choose the appropriate Medicare plans.

Following the implementation of Medicare Part D as a part of the Medicare Prescription Drug Improvement and Modernization Act of 2003, many seniors have had to make the switch from their original CONNPACE (Connecticut's State Pharmaceutical Assistance Program) drug plan to the newer system. In the original system, the drug planning was regulated and restricted to Connecticut residents only. That, however, has since changed. Medicare offers standardized national healthcare coverage options, including drug plans.

The ramifications of the newer system are fairly far reaching, especially among those who have not yet grasped the plan finder technology offered online to help select the right coverage. Further complicating the selection process are differences people have regarding other insurance or health. While the Medicare Part D system offers new, and sometimes more extensive plans, the process of selecting one can be quite complicated. With as many as fifty different drug plans available, oftentimes seniors lack the technical capabilities or the internet availability in order to utilize the services that would recommend the best program to fit their medication needs.

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Contributors:

Elizabeth Anderson, Daniel Buttrey, Rebecca DeSousa, Philip Hritcko, Kristina Kiley, Ryan McLean, Mary Ann Phaneuf, Peter Tyczkowski, and Wendy Carlson - New York Times.

HELP is available at Eastern Maine Medical Center

By: Kayla Ramsay

Delirium is an altered state of consciousness affecting patients in which an acute decline in attention and cognition occurs. It differs from Dementia or Alzheimer's in the rapidity in which it occurs in the patients. Patients brought into a hospital, especially senior citizens, are more likely to become delirious because of the sudden change in environment and their daily routines, resulting in confusion and disorientation. Delirium can occur very suddenly, sometimes within an hour, lasting in a range from a few minutes to many days, as well as recur in a patient repeatedly throughout a single day. If no method is attempted to keep these patients from being disoriented and becoming delirious, a patient's stay in the hospital could be affected, in some cases leading to a patient being discharged to a nursing home instead of being discharged home.

The Hospital Elder Life Program (HELP) has been one solution to help prevent delirium in patients. HELP was developed initially by Dr. Sharon K. Inouye from Yale in 1999. She experimented with different methods specifically designed to keep the patient alert and conscious of his or her surroundings. Patients involved in HELP during their hospital stay were less likely to develop delirium. Evidence has continued to show the methods used within the program prevent delirium from appearing in patients who are at risk, allowing the program to become more widespread in hospitals across the country.



P3 students Matthew King and Kelly Hughes completed their service learning hours working with HELP at Maine Medical Center in Portland, Maine.

While working with the Hospital Elder Life Program Matthew King "got to see how a hospital is run and what a pharmacist can contribute to a hospital."

While it is difficult to help a patient once they have become delirious, volunteer students as well as members of the community play a vital role in keeping

delirium from appearing in patients by constantly interacting with their patients.

Ignoring the risks for delirium in a patient, or letting a patient leave that has become delirious, can have lasting effects. Holly Bean, Manager/Supervisor of HELP at MMC, commented, "The mortality rate of a patient discharged increases if that person has become delirious during their stay at the hospital." She also believes that if the risks for delirium are ignored, a patient is more likely to fall down both in the hospital and after being discharged, which can be extremely harmful to a patient's health and send a patient back into the hospital.

Under the guidance and instruction of their preceptor, Ms. Bean, King and Hughes worked with geriatric patients who were evaluated and found to be at risk for delirium according to a Patient Baseline Assessment, a tool for determining the risk factor of the patient.

The goal for volunteers is to prevent confusion from developing in patients, causing them to become delirious. "As volunteers we make sure the patients' boards are up to date, engage in casual conversation with them, help them perform mobility exercises such as stretching, and things such as reading materials," explained King. As volunteers, King and Hughes participated in interdisciplinary rounds; communicated information with the team regarding patients and their medication, as well as shadowed clinical pharmacists within the hospital pharmacy.

Both students expressed challenges they faced while volunteering with HELP. "Sometimes it can be difficult to interact with patients," explained King, "because a minority of them are more reserved and restricted. It takes longer for them to become comfortable with us being around and offering our services to them." He added, "I was never really involved in the medical field beforehand, so I got to see how a hospital is run and what a pharmacist can contribute to a hospital." Hughes remarked, "A large adjustment for me was stepping out of the role of pharmacy student and into a completely different role of patient care."

Statistics show the program has resulted in many successes. Not only is the success rate of HELP at MMC over 90 percent for preventing delirium in patients, the feedback from the patients about the care given to them in the hospital also exhibits high satisfaction towards the program. Whenever a patient has been in the program for three or more days, they are given a patient satisfaction survey. Bean noted, "The success rate is 91 percent with patients responding they agree that volunteers 'visiting one or more times a day helped me during my hospitalization.'" These success rates reassure the staff and volunteers that their involvement with patients is making a difference.



Kelly Hughes found the experience invaluable. She "stepped out of the role of pharmacy student and into a completely different role of patient care."

HELP has also been expanding the areas in which they affect patient care. Currently at Maine Medical Center, there is an evidence-based study being conducted to statistically support the claim that delirium prevention administered by HELP affects the prevention of patients falling down both in the hospital and outside the hospital.

The rewards of this program felt by the volunteers are undeniable. "You go to see some patients and you know they're happy you are there. Sometimes all the patients need to prevent delirium from appearing is just someone to talk to; so knowing that just by being in their presence I am making a difference is a great feeling to take away," King responded. Hughes described, "I had my heart touched as many times as I touched others. I heard fantastic stories about history, families, and life in general. I could really tell that this part of my job is what benefitted my patients the most." ■

UConn Students Provide Proper Drug Disposal Advice

By: Elizabeth Wood

Three University of Connecticut School of Pharmacy students presented a proper drug disposal poster at the Cornucopia Fest 2010, sponsored by the UConn College of Agriculture and Natural Resources. The poster discredited popular beliefs of proper drug disposal, discussed the detriments of improper disposal methods, and described proper and effective alternate methods to dispose drugs safely and efficiently.

Peter Tyczkowski, coordinator of educational outreach, contacted students with an opportunity to create a presentation to show at the Cornucopia Fest. Shamsul Arif, Rosana Oliveira, and Katelyn Parsons eagerly responded and were selected to participate.

“The School of Pharmacy had been at Cornucopia before, but not with a presentation on drug disposal,” said Oliveira. The opportunity to discuss proper methods of drug disposal at such a popular event ensured a new understanding of disposal methods by those who visited their tent.

Popularized methods of drug disposal seem to be limited to flushing medications down either the sink or the toilet. The presentation sought to eliminate these methods and describe their negative effects. Research finds that “improper disposal of medications can cause harm to the environment, wildlife, pets, and people, and can contaminate the water supply.”

“The best way to dispose of drugs is through take-back days,” said Parsons. These events, held at a variety of locations, including health centers, police departments, and hospitals, allow for the collection of both controlled and uncontrolled substances so they may be disposed of in an environmentally safe manner.

Recently, School of Pharmacy students participated in a take-back day organized by John Dobbins, R. Ph., a pharmacist at the UConn Health Center and commissioner for the Southington Water

Department, in which 320 controlled substances were collected and 3,080 uncontrolled substances were collected.

Drugs cannot be brought directly to local Household Hazardous Waste collection sites, but there is an at home alternative. “Keep the drugs in the original container and block away all personal info using a marker,” Oliveira advised. “Then, mix the medication with an undesirable substance, such as coffee grounds or kitty litter. Tape the container closed, place it in an opaque bag, and throw it away.” Since the majority of trash in the State of Connecticut is incinerated, the drugs will be safely destroyed.

Improper drug disposal methods do not just take place at home. “Drug disposal practices in long-term care facilities (e.g. nursing homes) allow or require medications to be flushed down the toilet,” Arif said. If employees are trained to dispose of drugs improperly, then they may face legal action.

“There are no current standard federal guidelines on medical disposal at [institutional] settings, with the exception of controlled substances. Some states have pushed for eco-friendly medication disposal at nursing homes, but there is no such current focus in Connecticut,” Arif discovered.

Arif and Professor Thomas Buckley contacted the Clinical Director of PharMerica, a leading pharmacy service provider for institutional settings, in an effort to learn more about the issue. Although Buckley had not been previously involved with the project, “he is a great resource with pharmacy legislative issues and had attended the National Drug Take Back event held at the UConn Health Center just few days before our event,” Arif commented. His expertise was highly beneficial to the project.

PharMerica follows nursing home industry practice, as it cannot absorb the high cost of utilizing certified medication



Katelyn Parsons, Rosana Oliveira, and Samsul Arif presented information and answered drug disposal questions at UConn's Cornucopia Festival.

disposal distributors, thus forcing nursing homes to still use improper drug disposal methods. However, new federal legislation has specifically addressed the need to properly dispose of controlled medications in long-term care facilities, yet has not given clear guidance in how to dispose of these substances. This lack of direction has left both nursing homes and pharmacists uncertain on how to proceed.

The interest with PharMerica stems from its lack of participation in both drug take-back and disposal of medications due to the high-cost of destroying medications. This inability to absorb costs cause nursing homes to still use improper methods of drug disposal.

For example, “A drug take-back program at the UConn Health Center held a week before Cornucopia collected about 350 pounds of drugs, and cost approximately \$3,000 to \$4,000 just for destruction,” said Arif.

The poster at Cornucopia allowed the audience to voice their concerns. The plea for a drug take-back day near Storrs was strong, and Arif and Buckley discussed creating a medical disposal program close to the UConn campus.

The presence of the pharmacy students' poster at the Cornucopia Fest demonstrated the need for increased awareness on disposal methods. Greater awareness and an implementation of a stronger drug take-back program will reduce the contamination in water and guarantee a safer environment. ■

Bob Bepko Enjoys Showing Students the Hospital Pharmacy Environment

By: Ryan McLean

As director of professional services at Norwalk Hospital, Robert Bepko has made an important impact on the development of University of Connecticut pharmacy students on rotation. With approximately 20 students a year, each serving one-month rotations, Mr. Bepko shoulders a great deal of responsibility in their education. He explains how the experience “opens the eyes of the students who don’t always have institutional experience.” Thus, while the opportunity he provides is demanding in nature, it comes with the boon of new understanding about the practice of pharmacy. Lecture topics that might have seemed abstract in a classroom gain increasingly meaningful significance in their real-world applications. Bepko states, “The students realize there is a use for the knowledge the professors are teaching them—they realize the drugs have functions.”

Alongside his responsibilities as a preceptor, Mr. Bepko manages several pharmacies, including the lobby pharmacy located just through the main entrance on the first floor of the hospital, and the Health Center Pharmacy—together servicing approximately 700 patients each day. Many patients benefit from the services provided, ranging from same day surgery patients, to group home residents, to out-patient psychiatric programs. Work in Norwalk Hospital requires him to cope with the fast-paced nature of his occupation. “It’s a fast learning environment [because] these are all real patients,” he says.

“The students realize there is a use for the knowledge the professors are teaching them—they realize the drugs have functions.”



School of Pharmacy Advisory Board Member Bob Bepko is director of professional services at Norwalk Hospital.

Students on rotation can expect to feel the pressure as well. While on rotation, they are exposed to the rigorous pace in the daily life of a pharmacist. Some of their tasks include going on rounds in the intensive care unit, following up with lab analyses, and attending interdisciplinary conferences. Mr. Bepko described a situation in which a student attended a conference where the pharmacists, surgeons, and other professionals discussed topics that required an impressive breadth of knowledge. One of the aspects Mr. Bepko thinks is most surprising for those unfamiliar with his workplace is how much input the pharmacists have in these discussions. They contribute to important decisions as much as other professions do.

Referring to the education that UConn provides pharmacy students, Mr. Bepko lauds how “[it] prepares them to do lots of things, not just the traditional. You have the ability to go off into manufacturing, or pharmaceutical law, or distribution.” With all that Husky pride, it is not surprising

that Mr. Bepko has recently been invited to join the School of Pharmacy Advisory Board, where he participates in a dialogue with other professionals. He finds it surprising that despite how different the practice sites are, each has similar challenges.

Besides the dialogue apparent in the advisory board, Mr. Bepko engages in community endeavors. Recently, he participated in a well-attended Career Open House in Bridgeport, in order to guide high school seniors towards future career paths. By having frank interactions with students about the six-year pharmacy program, he was able to “positively influence several people.” While pharmacy education is not for everyone, he hopes that it will be helpful in opening up students to new possibilities.

As a final piece of advice to students who hope to one day become pharmacists, Mr. Bepko describes how “it is critical for any health care professional to maintain their credibility. If you don’t know the answer, then get back to them and give them the right answer.” Perhaps the words resonate more given his personal success, but they are also evidence of a commitment to the education of students on rotation. Although the environment in which he works under causes some duress, he says that most students “rise to the occasion.” Such achievement and personal development on the part of the students reflects a preceptor and a practice that offer indispensable opportunities. ■

Save the Date

The School of Pharmacy’s Preceptor Appreciation Dinner will take place on Thursday, October 27, 2011 at Saint Clements Castle in Portland, CT.



Director's Message

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events and to excess health care utilization. The inappropriate use of medications by the elderly is also an important concern for patient safety and can place this population at especially high risk for falls associated with their drug therapy. Pharmacists can have a tremendous impact in this area by reducing this risk by reviewing patient medical records.

This past year we were involved with a grant funded by the Connecticut Collaboration for Fall Prevention. The UConn School of Pharmacy worked directly with VNA East, Inc. which is a private non-profit home care program serving over 20 towns in Eastern Connecticut. The purpose of this collaboration was to raise consciousness among older adults and the public regarding fall risk and prevention strategies, offer multi-faceted fall risk assessments to individuals in the communities, enhance existing fall risk assessments for VNA East patients by including medication reviews by (P3) pharmacy students, and to increase the pharmacy students' experience and knowledge of the impact falls and the role of home health care providers in the continuum of care.

UConn Field Coordinator Lisa Bragaw, RPh was directly involved with the pharmacy students reviewing all medication reviews and recommendations made by our (P3) pharmacy students. Lisa would use these opportunities to educate not only the pharmacy students but also the other health care providers regarding potential medication risk factors related to their drug therapy. The P3 pharmacy students not only had the opportunity to practice Medication Therapy Management (MTM) through their review of patient charts but were able to visit the patients at their home accompanied by a VNA nurse coordinator. This unique experience gave the students the opportunity to observe and interact with the patients in their home environment.

This IPPE allowed our P3 students to be involved with interprofessional activities in a unique setting. Students enhanced both their verbal and written communication skills and were able to apply some of the

didactic knowledge that they gained in class to actual clinical cases. The pharmacy students were able to focus on potential medication related fall risk factors that could possibly reduce the incidence of fall related events in this VNA patient population. Both the School of Pharmacy and VNA East benefited from this collaboration and we hope to continue this experience into the future.

This is just one example of the many IPPE projects that have been incorporated into the UConn School of Pharmacy experiential education program this past year. The goal of these experiences are to introduce pharmacy students to the importance of community engagement, encourage their collaboration as future members of the health care team, and to work to reduce problems in health care access. UConn student pharmacists are also involved with numerous other service-learning projects including Migrant Farm Workers (MFW) Clinics, South Park Clinic, Covenant Soup Kitchen, health fairs, and senior centers just to name a few.

I would like to thank those preceptors who have volunteered this summer to mentor our pharmacy students at the MFW Clinics. There are too many of you to list in this article but we were able to have at least one pharmacist mentor present for each of our MFW Clinics. For many of our pharmacist volunteers this was the first time that they had ever attended any of our MFW Clinics. They found the experience extremely rewarding by working in an interprofessional environment, helping the underserved, and mentoring our UConn pharmacy students.

As you can see our UConn student pharmacists are engaged in numerous activities with their communities. Therefore, we are always looking for pharmacists willing to mentor our students who are engaged in these service learning activities. If you would like to learn more information and/or volunteer to be a pharmacist mentor for one of these service learning activities please feel free to contact the UConn Office of Experiential Education at 860-486-1592.

Respectfully,



Medicare Bus

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"Do they want number one or number twenty-one, or number thirty-one?"

It's very confusing for seniors sometimes," explains Peter Tyczkowski, who organizes UConn student involvement with the Medicare Program.



State of Connecticut Medicare Part D Bus

Students assist consumers by educating them about the different Medicare options, and presenting them with possible plans. UConn students provide an outlet for the proper acquisition of the information required to make informed decisions about their future drug coverage. The primary goal for UConn students who participate on the Medicare Part D bus is to analyze and determine the plans with the best trade-off between premiums and benefits for each patient, avoiding unnecessary drug coverage that would correspond to higher monthly premiums.

Students are deployed alongside professionals and other volunteers who assist in Medicare Plan selection, granting students more insight into their future professional options. The benefits for the students are evident. In addition to increased knowledge in an important aspect in the field of pharmacy, students get hands-on experience working with patients, and learn ways to talk to those patients. "Students get a better look at the nuances that are involved," says Mr. Tyczkowski. "It is good face time with people who need meds."

Several students participate, sometimes outside of the traditional hours, on their own time. "It is not unusual for students going home on winter break to help seniors pick Medicare plans," says Mr. Tyczkowski. Despite the difficulty that students face participating in community service around the time of finals and alongside other responsibilities, the results are always impressive. Thanks to UConn involvement, many senior citizens are better able to choose the most intelligent drug coverage for their particular needs. ■