The vision for the Medco School of Pharmacy at Fairleigh Dickinson University (FDU) in Madison, New Jersey, when it opens next fall, is to produce pharmacists who can tackle the health care challenges of the 21st century, said Ruth Nemire, the school’s dean.

“What we’re really trying to do is to find new areas where pharmacists will practice,” Nemire said.

Nemire said the school is now finalizing programs leading to a Pharm.D. degree alone or in combination with a master’s degree in pharmaceutical science, business administration, or public administration.

As these basic programs are completed, she said, the school will focus on innovative degree tracks in emerging areas where pharmacists’ expertise is increasingly needed.

These programs include dual-degree tracks that include a master’s degree in health sciences with a concentration in regulatory affairs, clinical research methods, or health informatics.

Nemire said she wants to have these specialty programs in place for the inaugural class and would also like to develop a master’s program in pharmacogenomics. She is also interested in preparing pharmacists to become involved in political advocacy to support the goal of having the profession recognized as integral members of the health care team.

“There are really so many places where specialized knowledge is needed for practice,” Nemire said.

The school hopes to attract the interest of both college students starting on the pharmacy path and working professionals who want to enhance their training. Nemire said many of the master’s degree programs will be offered online so that members of the military and other professionals can participate.

Nemire said about 300 people have expressed interest in the school, which expects to enroll up to 85 students next fall.

Startup support. One of the first things Nemire did when she came to the school from the Touro College of Pharmacy in New York City was to seek others who shared her vision for pharmacy practice.

She approached long-time pharmacy colleague Russell Teagarden, vice president for scientific affairs at Franklin Lakes, New Jersey-headquartered Medco Health Solutions, and asked if Medco would be willing to support the school.

The answer was yes, with Medco ultimately making a $5 million contribution to the nearby school to help it get started.

“Our [chief executive officer] has said directly to me that the profession of pharmacy has been an important contributor to the company and the company’s clients, and he thought that it was a good thing to do to recognize that in this form,” Teagarden said of the donation to the school.

Teagarden said Medco is sharing him with the new pharmacy school, where he will serve as an associate dean and teach classes. In addition to courses on health systems and health care policy, he would like to teach “courses that draw from the humanities to teach students what the illness experience is,” he said.

He said Medco believes there is a need to train pharmacists to integrate successfully with the network of professionals whose work is relevant to drug therapy. These include not just clinicians but also insurers, communications firms, patient-education groups, regulators, and drug companies, he said.

“There are so many different sources of input on how drugs are used where drug therapeutic expertise is needed. And this is why the opportunity range for pharmacy school graduates is exploding,” Teagarden said. “We have a shortage of pharmacists when you consider all these other areas that need therapeutic expertise along with additional skills that can put them into these areas.”

Medco’s worldwide staff of nearly 25,000 provides pharmacy benefits management, specialty pharmacy services, and other health-related services to about 65 million people. The company employs more than 3000 pharmacists.

Teagarden said Medco has long supported pharmacy education by hosting pharmacy students and residents for rotations at the company’s facilities, sponsoring fellowships, partnering in
research, and serving as faculty at schools across the country.

He said Medco’s support of its new neighbor will not alter the company’s existing relationships with other pharmacy schools.

But he said pharmacists who emerge from FDU’s program will have a lot to offer the company, which has struggled to find new practitioners who are prepared for the type of work Medco does.

“The graduates of this school will be highly attractive to Medco and lots of other types of health care organizations,” Teagarden predicted.

Nemire said Medco’s donation is a “very significant contribution” to FDU but constitutes only about 20% of what is needed to launch the pharmacy school. She said she is looking to partner with other entities to create the type of program that she and her fellow deans envision.

Nemire said accreditation of the school is proceeding according to the Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education’s (ACPE’s) usual timeline. She said that although the school has substantial support from Medco, it will be run by FDU staff in accordance with ACPE accreditation standards.

Teagarden also emphasized that FDU, not Medco, is in charge of the pharmacy school.

“People are getting a little confused that this is Medco’s pharmacy school. It is not. Medco definitely has an interest and wants it to succeed. But we want all pharmacy schools to succeed,” he said. “We’re very serious about working with pharmacy education.”

Once it is approved, FDU’s Medco School of Pharmacy will be the second ACPE-accredited pharmacy school in New Jersey. The state is also home to the Ernest Mario School of Pharmacy in Piscataway, which is part of the Rutgers University system.

—Kate Traynor
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News Brief

• Manufacturers should package their nonprescription oral liquid products with a device that measures the liquid in the same units as are mentioned in the dosage instructions, FDA announced in May. According to the guidance, a mismatch between the units of measure on the device and in the dosage instructions may render the product “misbranded.” Issuance of the guidance follows through on one of the agency’s Safe Use Initiative target areas (see January 1, 2010, AJHP News). The Consumer Healthcare Products Association, representing manufacturers and distributors of nonprescription medicines and nutritional supplements, had earlier adopted a similar, but voluntary, guideline.