

“Transformational leadership of a kind seldom seen in professional life is required of us if we are to achieve our vision in pharmacy education and if we are to contribute meaningfully in creating a truly patient-centered, seamless and safe, outcomes focused health care system,” said Barbara G. Wells, Pharm.D., in her address, “Why Leadership? It’s All About Patients,” delivered July 20 at the American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy Annual Meeting in Minneapolis.

Wells recalled that in the 1990s, when the philosophy of pharmaceutical care was articulated by pharmacy’s best thinkers, “we understood that implementing these models would not be easy, but we expected (perhaps naively) to be further along in their accomplishment by now than we are. But if the challenges are greater than ever before, so are the potential pay offs,” said Wells, who is dean of The University of Mississippi School of Pharmacy. “We pharmacy educators fully realize that our mission is to improve health. It’s not about us. It is about patients. And we seek to accomplish our mission of improving health through our teaching, our research, and various forms of service, including patient care services. To the extent that we provide the leadership to influence the thinking of our colleagues, to navigate around the proponents of the status quo, and to bolt over the immovable objects, we will be successful in improving health in this country and worldwide.”

To help develop future leaders for academic pharmacy, AACP has established the Academic Leadership Fellows Program. This program will target pharmacy faculty and administrators aspiring to leadership positions with increasing responsibility in academic pharmacy and higher education, said Wells. The program will seek to broaden participants’ understanding of the major issues and challenges confronting faculty, pharmacy education, and the profession and provide participants an increased understanding of their strengths as leaders, she explained. It will also assist participants in building relationships with experienced leaders in academic pharmacy and the profession. Pfizer, through Sal Giorgiani, director of external relations, has pledged its financial support for this AACP initiative. The inaugural AACP Pfizer Academic Leadership Program for Pharmacy Faculty will begin with the class of 2004-05.

Wells outlined her vision for the future “in which patients would live longer and higher quality lives, and pharmacists would be more competent, better rewarded, and more satisfied with their roles in health care. And it would be a future in which pharmacy education would deliver a cutting edge curriculum, and meet the full spectrum of their responsibilities to students, faculty, and alumni.

Over time, educators’ and practitioners’ needs for leadership development will likely become more acute, as health care becomes more complex and as the opportunities for pharmacists to positively impact patients’ quality and length of life increase, said Wells.

“Leadership is not about building our vitae, expanding our national reputations, or drawing

a higher salary,” Wells stressed. “It’s about patients. It’s about the child whose asthma is poorly controlled and who repeatedly lands in the emergency department wheezing through blue lips. It’s about the newly admitted 79 year-old female who discontinues her antihypertensive medication because the label cautioned, ‘may cause dizziness.’ It’s about the inadequately treated patient with post-partum depression who is a risk to herself and her five children. All of us have a responsibility to develop leadership abilities in ourselves, in our colleagues, and in our students. In the final analysis, our true measure as leaders will be not the number of people who follow us, but the number of people we serve.”

Janice Zoeller