

# New Notre Dame pharmacy school proves innovative

During her junior year at Lehigh University two years ago, Jennifer Cochran began to contemplate becoming a pharmacist.

She had little direction about the career, but knew her aunt was in the field at a shopping market. Cochran spent a day shadowing her and was amazed.

"I really liked that patients were the center of the whole thing," Cochran said. "I'm passionate for people and caring for people, so I just thought that would be a good fit."

Cochran began exploring options at local colleges and found that the College of Notre Dame of Maryland was starting a school of pharmacy during the fall of 2009.

Cochran found that her goals matched Notre Dame's and is now part of the first class at the pharmacy school.

"Our goal, in terms of the program," said Dr. Anne Lin, the school's dean, "is that we want to graduate pharmacists who are going to be empathetic, caring and capable of taking care of a diverse patient population (in the United States)."

The average age of the 70 students at the school is 25, and most arrive with a bachelor's degree. During a pre-interview process, students were told they would be accountable for their own learning.

"In order for that pharmacist to provide care, we need a professional who can think, who can lead and who has a willingness to serve," Lin said. "The entire curriculum was designed around that common philosophy."

The Washington-Baltimore region is a promising one for pharmacists beyond store and hospital pharmacies, as career paths veer into government agencies, public managed care, public health services, nursing homes and teaching.

"That's something we're learning about already," Cochran said. "Most people don't

even know there's so much out there."

The pharmacy school is a four-year professional school. Students are expected to act and dress professionally each day.

That was evident Oct. 2 as pharmacy students Quinee Patel, Vivian Nwankwo and Ali Tharoo administered a hand-washing seminar in a gathering area and taught proper use of hand sanitizer.

Students are aware of the ongoing political debates about health care and pharmaceutical companies. Regular discussions are held to build awareness of those developments.

Michelle Fritsch, a professor and the chair of the department of administrative and clinical sciences, said students are being immersed in the profession.

"I get the joy of teaching some of the hands on, practice-oriented courses," she said. "We have a lot of projects going on. The students are getting a lot of early exposure to how to talk to patients and early exposure to real live patients."

Jim Culhane, a professor and the chair of pharmaceutical sciences, teaches biomedical sciences that underpin a pharmacists' knowledge of medication.

Culhane said there is a dedication to teaching the application of basic sciences and making students aware of the connection to clinical sciences.

"Those types of courses are typically taught separately," Culhane said "and it's left for the student to make the connection between the basic science components of the curriculum and how they apply to the clinical and administrative sciences. I think that's something that's very special program. "

Fritsch said being part of Notre Dame's developing pharmacy school is thrilling.

"We spent a whole year prepping for this, so it's so exciting to have real life, breathing people to work with," Fritsch said. "We put a lot of innovation into the curriculum and it's fun to see all of that come to fruition and all this hard work pay off."