

Antiviral expert

becomes new pharmacy dean

by Elizabeth Kumru



UNMC Chancellor Harold M. Maurer, M.D., said it more than once throughout the interview process.

“A dean should be a dean and something else.”

That one sentence made a big difference to Courtney Fletcher, Pharm.D., when he was interviewing for the position of dean of the College of Pharmacy.

“It reflects forward thinking and a vision for leadership,” Dr. Fletcher said. “It said to me that UNMC’s leadership stays engaged in academic life, giving them more credibility as administrators.”

That “something else” for Dr. Fletcher will be continuing his HIV research, now funded through 2013 by \$1 million in grants from the National Institutes of Health.

“It was a very important discussion for me, because I wasn’t sure that I was ready to walk away from my research,” he said.

“Dr. Fletcher was our first choice,” Dr. Maurer said. “He is a nationally renowned leader and has focused his considerable research skills on HIV projects, all of which are federally funded. In addition, he brings a great deal of expertise to advancing our educational programs.”

Dr. Fletcher’s research experience is prolific. He has devoted his research and practice interests toward the clinical pharmacology of antiviral agents. His cumulative federal funding as principal investigator is approximately \$9.3 million in direct costs, while the total value of federally funded projects on which Dr. Fletcher has worked for the past 20 years as a co-investigator is approximately \$40 million.

Dr. Fletcher began his new position at UNMC in November. With 25 years of academic pharmacy experience behind him, Dr. Fletcher immediately set to work to start a new era at the College of Pharmacy that will strengthen the research enterprise and educational curriculum.

His vision for the college is to develop strong leadership among faculty and students.

“I want our faculty and students to be nationally and internationally recognized as a community of leaders who are scientists, educators and practitioners, guided by the highest ethical standards. They should focus on advancing science, enhancing the education of pharmacists and other health professionals, and developing graduate and post-graduate students to improve human health,” he said.

Dr. Fletcher’s foot fell upon the path to a career in pharmacy and research only after his second year in community college, where he excelled in chemistry, math and biology. He had always leaned toward pharmacy, having played in the drugstore as a child in Greybull, Wyo., where his mother worked.

After earning his doctor of pharmacy degree from the University of Minnesota in 1982, Dr. Fletcher held academic pharmacy positions at Drake University (1982-83) and the University of Minnesota (1983-2002).

Prior to UNMC, he was a professor with joint appointments in the department of clinical pharmacy, School of Pharmacy, and the division of infectious diseases in the department of medicine at the Colorado Health Sciences

AT A GLANCE

Courtney V. Fletcher, Pharm.D.

AGE: 52
MARRIED: 24 years to Jean, also a pharmacist
BORN: Greybull, Wyo.
TITLE: Dean of the College of Pharmacy
DEGREES: Bachelor’s degree in pharmacy, University of Wyoming, 1978
Doctor of Pharmacy (Pharm.D.), University of Minnesota, 1982

EXPERIENCE:

- University of Colorado Health Sciences Center, Denver, 2002-2006
- » Associate Director, Colorado HIV Research Training Program, since 2006
 - » Professor, Division of Infectious Diseases, since 2005
 - » Chairman and Professor, Department of Clinical Pharmacy
- University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, 1983-2002
- » Member, University of Minnesota Cancer Center, 1998-2002
 - » Professor, experimental and clinical pharmacology, College of Pharmacy, 1997-2002
- Drake University, Des Moines, 1982-1983
- » Clinical Assistant Professor of pharmacy
 - » Clinical Pharmacist, surgical intensive care and nutritional support, Mercy Hospital Center

PUBLIC SERVICE:

- AIDS Discovery and Development of Therapeutics Study Section, NIH, since 2003
- Clinical Practices for the Treatment of HIV Infection Panel, Department of Health and Human Services, since 2001
- Executive Committee, Adults AIDS Clinical Trials Group, National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, since 2003

PUBLICATIONS:

Authored or co-authored more than 110 manuscripts in peer-reviewed scientific journals and more than 140 research papers for presentation at national and international scientific meetings.

HOBBIES:

Downhill skiing, running, biking and gardening roses.
Two dogs — a Sheltie named Hugo, and an English setter, Olly.

Center in Denver. Dr. Fletcher also served as director of the Antiviral Pharmacology Laboratory there.

Moving to UNMC was an easy decision. “UNMC has a premiere college of pharmacy with a long, distinguished history of pharmacy education and research. I want to take a strong school and try to make it better, and be recognized by our peers as a college where nobody does it better,” he said.

Dr. Fletcher succeeds Clarence Ueda, Pharm.D., Ph.D., who has been with the UNMC College of Pharmacy for 33 years and served as dean the past 20 years. Dr. Ueda has returned to the classroom full-time as a tenured professor in the pharmaceutical sciences department.

“Our college is not the biggest, so we’ll be more selective in the areas of excellence we develop,” Dr. Fletcher said, citing the internationally recognized expertise of the faculty in nanotechnology, nanoimaging, drug delivery and drug synthesis programs at the college.

“In five years, I would like to see significant growth in the basic, clinical and translational research enterprise. I want to continue to grow the excellent education program. We’ll be conducting an internal assessment that will tell us where our students stand in their preparation for service to the public. With the complexity of drug therapies now and in the future, students need to be better medication problem solvers,” he said.

“I’m a believer that research makes our teaching and clinical practice better,” Dr. Fletcher said. “Researchers strive to discover and disseminate new knowledge. It completes the circle (of education and patient care). We’re all about trying to change people’s lives for the better.”

Dr. Fletcher’s Antiviral Pharmacology Laboratory will move to UNMC from Colorado. “They’re already remodeling space on the fourth floor of the college for my lab,” he said of the move that is expected to be completed later this spring.

Dr. Fletcher’s research is focused on trying to treat viral infections in immunocompromised patients. Much of his early research work was done at the University of Minnesota, where the Antiviral Pharmacology Laboratory was founded in 1993. Minnesota, like UNMC, is home to a major solid organ transplant center.

He became interested in the AIDS virus when many AIDS patients were being diagnosed with cytomegalovirus (CMV) infection of the eye. He had done extensive research on CMV, which can be life threatening for patients who are immunocompromised.

He currently is principal investigator on two long-standing NIH grants from the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases. One grant was originally funded in 1993 and the other in 1996. They provide funding for adult and pediatric AIDS pharmacology laboratories. During his research career, he has been involved in 25 funded research projects.

Dr. Fletcher, who served four years on the Antiviral Drug Advisory Committee for the Food and Drug Administration among other national and international committees, also will encourage faculty members to commit to similar public service responsibilities.

“Our faculty members have a valuable contribution to make to public policy debates,” he said. ☺☺