More Than 125 Years of Excellence
Celebrating Our Past and Building Our Future

"Be careful what you ask for, you just might get it!"

by Dean Craig K. Svensson

I am not sure if John N. Hurty ever heard those words, but he could have coined them. When this Indianapolis community pharmacist suggested to Purdue President James Smart that the university should start a school of pharmacy, he most likely had no thought that he would lead the fledgling program as it opened its doors in 1884. Yet, we who are a part of the Purdue Pharmacy family owe a tremendous debt of gratitude for Hurty’s passion for his chosen profession and desire to see the Hoosier
state served by highly qualified pharmacists. When he and the other three faculty members that comprised the program developed the original plan of study, they charted a course for excellence that continues to this day.

Since opening our doors in 1884, the School has observed and been a part of many changes in the profession of pharmacy and the sciences that form its foundation. While many of us tired of the 40 year debate over the BS versus PharmD as the entry level degree, degree diversity existed in the early stages of the School. In 1897, the School instituted the option for students to earn a PhG (Pharmacy Graduate), PhC (Pharmaceutical Chemist) or BS (4 year) degree. Our predecessors apparently made decisions more quickly than in recent time, as it only took 33 years to decide to offer the BS as the entry level degree, becoming the sole program for graduating pharmacists in 1930.

Few living pharmacists can remember the profession without access to antibiotics or other life-saving medications that are taken for granted by most of us today. Yet the program was no less rigorous in those early days in its expectations of students. When the program began, materia medica was largely plant derived and required expertise in botany, chemical extraction, and other subjects that necessitated intensive laboratory experiences. The art of pharmacy was an essential component of daily practice, with most therapeutic options requiring some level of extemporaneous compounding. By necessity, the emphasis of the educational program focused on preparing professionals who could create high quality and uniform products tailored to individual patients (Perhaps this individualization presaged the modern genomics era!).

The mass manufacturing of pharmaceutical products containing highly potent drugs created a sea change in pharmacy practice. What was once the art of pharmacy became the purview of national manufacturers and the 'mystery' of pharmacy practice stood at risk of being reduced to transferring products from large to small containers. While the change in drug source occurred rapidly, changes in the profession occurred at a somewhat slower pace. Fortunately, we have continued to benefit from faculty who were able to see what could be rather than simply what existed at present. They have continually dedicated themselves to preparing the pharmacists of tomorrow while urging the pharmacists of today to seize emerging opportunities.

As advances in pharmacology provided a stronger platform for drug development, the growth of critical knowledge in biopharmaceutics and pharmacokinetics created an opportunity for pharmacists to contribute their unique training to improve the rational use of drugs. This led to a greater emphasis on pathophysiology and clinical assessment of drug response in pharmacy curriculum across the country. A special challenge to the pharmacy program at Purdue was its geographic isolation from a major medical center that could provide much needed clinical experience for student pharmacists, as well as important practice sites for a developing cadre of clinical faculty. Our program benefited from the presence of path blazing faculty, such as Dr. Bruce Carlstedt, who created a footprint on the IU Medical Center that today serves as home for over 20 faculty in the Department of Pharmacy Practice.
The impact of the Purdue pharmacy program has long reached well beyond the confines of West Lafayette. Purdue was a leader in the development of pharmacy administration and clinical pharmacy. Faculty research at Purdue has influenced the way we manufacture drugs, regulate environmental chemicals, and deliver patient care. Our faculty have produced educational materials that serve as the platform for teaching organic chemistry, pharmacology, and several other topics in universities across the country. Today, our program touches the neediest of patients in western Kenya and the drug development leaders of tomorrow in Tanzania.

Though not an alumnus, I was impacted by faculty at Purdue in several different ways during my years in pharmacy school. I well remember reading Dr. Carlstedt's regular articles in the US Pharmacist while working in a community pharmacy in central Maryland. I also owe a debt of gratitude to one of my Dean predecessors, 'Tip' Tyler, for his special assistance while I was a pharmacy student in Baltimore. Like many programs in the 1970s, we used Dean Tyler's pharmacognosy textbook as a part of our curriculum. One semester I faced a challenging dilemma - I needed to replace my shoes, which had developed a hole in the sole. Not having the money to buy a new pair, I decided to sell one or more of my textbooks to get the cash. It turned out that Dean Tyler's book had the highest resale value. Thanks to Dean Tyler's quality textbook, I was able to complete the program with dry feet!

One benefit of anniversaries is that they provide a designated moment to pause and reflect on the past. Reviewing the rich tradition of Purdue Pharmacy certainly creates a sense of admiration for those on whose shoulders we stand. It also evokes a sense of responsibility to assure that we who are the current stewards of the program leave it on a trajectory to enrich this great tradition. I can assure you that our faculty and staff are dedicated to adding to the rich tradition we inherited upon joining the School. With opportunities for pharmacists and pharmaceutical scientists broader than ever before, the days ahead promise to be ones of great opportunity!