

School of Medicine to reform curriculum

More than half of American schools have undertaken major revision of their curricula in the last decade. USU School of Medicine (SOM) Dean Larry Laughlin, M.D., Ph.D., determined that the SOM will revise the structure of its curriculum for the class entering in 2011. He made this decision after a six month period of discovery in which he reviewed the changes made in many other U.S. schools, and outlined the plans for the process during a faculty meeting in December.

“Curriculum is the blueprint for a physician. Our school forms a very unique military blueprint; it’s time for a renewal of the blueprint,” said Laughlin.

Laughlin appointed Alison O’Brien, Ph.D., chair of the Department of Microbiology and Immunology, and Louis Pangaro, M.D., chair of the Department of Medicine, to lead the faculty in this comprehensive effort. In the new curriculum, Laughlin has requested a tighter linkage between basic and clinical sciences in all four years of medical school; that the clinical clerkships in which the students work closely with hospital faculty in caring for patients should begin before the third year of medical school; and, that careful attention be paid to assessing students’ growing competence in all four years.

Between November 2009 and October 2010, O’Brien and Pangaro will lead the development effort to determine the overall structure of the new curriculum. To reflect the nature of the proposed changes in the curriculum and its foundation in the unique environment of the military, the pair has entitled the venture, “Molecules to Military Medicine.”

An advisory committee, chaired by associate dean for Faculty Col. (Dr.) Brian Reamy, was formed which includes Val Hemming, M.D., former dean of the SOM; Brian Cox, Ph.D., former chair of Pharmacology; Saibal Dey, Ph.D., associate professor of Biochemistry; Cmdr. (Dr.) Patricia McKay, USU Class of 1993 and SOM commandant; and Edward Mitre, M.D., an assistant professor, active in both basic research and clinical teaching. Michael Johns, M.D., a member of the USU Board of Regents and chancellor of Emory University, will serve as an informal advisor to the group.

The Military Health System is unique to the U.S. in having its own medical school dedicated specifically to creating a physician corps to care for its warriors and beneficiaries. The comprehensive curricular reform effort at USU will have faculty and students work with patients, leaders of graduate education and the leaders of the MHS to identify outcomes that will be important for the coming decades.

“We need a curriculum adaptable, creative and innovative in its approach to the lifelong pursuit of mastering medicine,” said Laughlin.