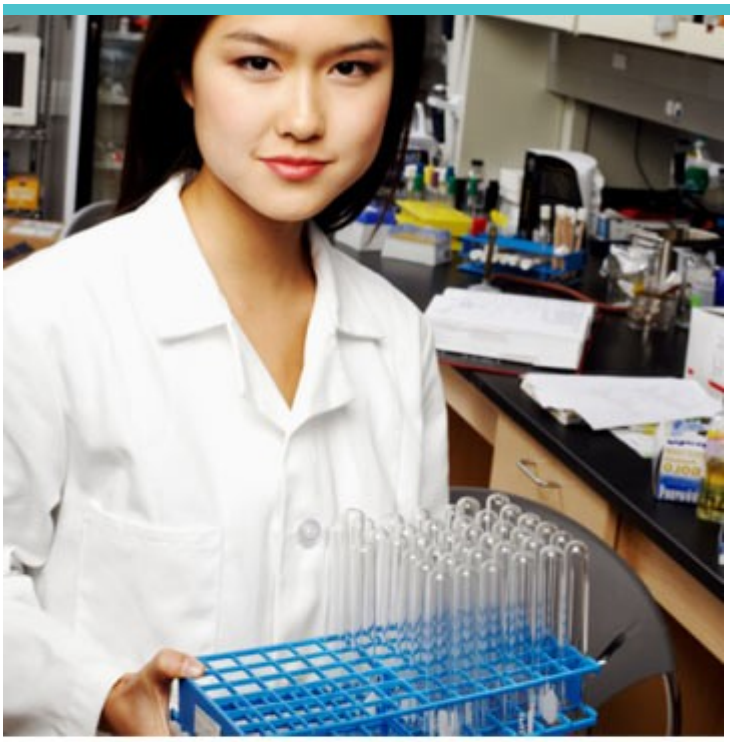
As part of our ongoing support of Pharmacy, Pharmaceutical Partners of Canada is proud to bring you the second in a series of features about the new School of Pharmacy at The University of Waterloo.



Breaking down walls to create Canada's first Pharmacy co-op program.

Ask Dr. Jake Thiessen about the University of Waterloo's new School of Pharmacy and he gets a sparkle in his eye. He's absolutely passionate about the school, and he'll literally talk for hours about this groundbreaking project.

But there's one facet of the school's story that really sparks his enthusiasm: the new School of Pharmacy offers Canada's first co-op Pharmacy program.

"Until now, Pharmacy graduates have generally emerged with terrific 'head' knowledge, but they have been short on the translation of that knowledge into practice. That's going to change here because of our co-op program," says Dr. Thiessen.

The team that designed the school spent much time researching Pharmacy education programs in other universities, and the one thought that kept recurring was "Why not co-op?" At Northeastern University in Massachusetts – the only school in North America that has a Co-op Program -- graduates are in huge demand, and there is 100% support for the co-op model from the students there. Still, getting to the point of deciding to incorporate a co-op Pharmacy program has been an uphill battle for Dr. Thiessen.

"Universities have typically embraced the medical model, with all the theory up front, and all the practical experience at the end of the program. However, we were keen to have our graduates hit the ground running with rich practical experience. Co-op appeared to be the answer, but it was unconventional in Pharmacy."

In his mind, "co-op" doesn't just mean getting a four-month job behind the counter of a local pharmacy.

"We want our students to have experiences in a broader range of pharmacy, more than just 'pour, lick and stick.' I believe there are co-op placement opportunities with industry, health teams, government, and even companies like RIM that are developing new generations of technology. The possibilities are endless."

Dr. Thiessen is also a big believer in giving graduates a world-view of health care and thereby broadening the impact and opportunities for Pharmacy.

“One aspect of the co-op program placement program will be international. We have a student who had done a water project in Bangladesh, and I was happy to be able to tell her that she could go back to Bangladesh to work on a health care project. This illustrates the larger world of Pharmacy.”

Dr. Thiessen feels that the University of Waterloo is the ideal place to establish Canada’s only co-op Pharmacy program. After all, the university is already well known and respected for its belief in the power of co-op.

“At the University of Waterloo there are more than 12,000 students who do co-op every year. Why not our school of Pharmacy? Bill Gates is a great supporter of Waterloo. He has sought its graduates because he gets employees who have real world experience, are ready to problem-solve and take on projects. That’s the kind of world-ready Pharmacy graduates we’ll be turning out.”

Dr. Thiessen believes this co-op crusade will pay substantial dividends for Pharmacy graduates, and for the entire profession.

“Co-op is a no-brainer”, says Dr. Thiessen. “We may be swimming up-stream, but we’re committed to it, and it’s going to happen.”

There’s more to come about the new School of Pharmacy at the University of Waterloo. Next month, read about the school’s unique philosophy that Pharmacy should be “of the community”.

Dr. Jake Thiessen

University of Waterloo’s new School of Pharmacy will open in 2008.

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