

By:

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Meet Dr. Brookie Best, Dean of the Skaggs School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences

This month, Brookie Best was named new dean of the Skaggs School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences, succeeding James McKerrow, who stepped down in June after serving as dean for seven years.

Best is a familiar face. She joined Skaggs faculty in 2003, just one year after the school opened its doors to its first class, rising to professor of clinical pharmacy and pediatrics and associate dean for pharmacy education.

Her contributions span the school's missions of research, education and clinical care.

She has mentored more than 130 students and been named Professor of the Year by the Associated Students three times.

Her research, which includes 20 years of designing and conducting pediatric and obstetric pharmacokinetic clinical trials, includes studying maternal/fetal and pediatric clinical pharmacology, exploring the effects of anti-HIV drugs in pregnant women, children and non-pregnant adults, and drugs used to treat Kawasaki disease, the leading cause of acquired heart disease in children.

She has authored more than 130 peer-reviewed papers, lectured on maternal and pediatric drug therapeutics at the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases and served on working groups and advisory committees for the National Institutes of Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the World Health Organization.

Best completed her Bachelor of Science degree in chemistry at UC San Diego in 1994, then her Doctor of Pharmacy at UC San Francisco in 1999, followed by a residency in pharmacy practice at UC San Diego.

Skaggs School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences is one of only three public schools of pharmacy in California and is ranked among the top 20 pharmacy schools in the nation by U.S. News & World Report.

It has an enrollment of 280 PharmD students and trains masters and PhD students, dual-degree students and post-doctoral residents and fellows. It graduates annually approximately 70 Doctor of Pharmacy students and 25 Drug Development and Product Management Master of Science students.



Dr. Brookie Best

Q. What attracted you to pharmacy and pharmaceutical science? Was there a particular person or experience that directed your career?

A. When I discovered the field of pharmacy, while working as a pre-school teacher after college, I was excited to pursue a career that combined my scientific background in chemistry, math and physiological sciences with my interests in teaching and human behavior. My research interests in pharmaceutical sciences (how to properly dose medications in pregnancy, lactation and childhood) were a natural extension of my love of all things pediatric, along with my skills in applied math and chemistry. I was very fortunate to have many key advisors, mentors and sponsors at every step of my career, starting from family members who helped me find this career path (my parents, grandparents and late husband) and extending to new key professional mentors and guides at each step through school, post-graduate training and throughout my entire faculty

career. Two people were instrumental in creating the opportunity for my pivot into academia: my fellowship mentors, Drs. Edmund V. Capparelli and James D. Connor.

Q. What aspects of pharmaceutical research are you most interested in? What are your goals?

A. I have very broad research interests. In addition to my contributions in the areas of perinatal/pediatric clinical pharmacology, drug development and educational research, my goal is to broadly develop our school as the hub and invaluable resource for all types of pharmacy-related research. This includes building on our existing successes in computational drug design; innovative drug discovery efforts in nearly every therapeutic area, including discovering drugs from the sea; novel enabling technologies and new research methods to enhance our understanding of host-compound interactions; unique drug delivery methods; drug development and regulatory expertise spanning drug discovery through clinical and post-marketing trials; novel inter-professional clinical practice and education/training models to improve patient outcomes; and public health and population-level research to optimize medication therapy and improve the health of our communities. I see boundless opportunities for synergistic partnerships with other units throughout campus, the region, the UC system and beyond.

Q. You have been a member of the Skaggs faculty almost from the day the school opened in 2002. How would you describe its growth and evolution over the last two decades? What's different now from then?

A. My simplistic analogy is that our Founding Dean Palmer Taylor led us through our initial establishment of the program and our childhood (the first decade or so), with explosive growth in student, faculty and staff numbers year after year. His vision to integrate biomedical sciences training with the School of Medicine was groundbreaking and remains a national model for inter-professional training. Dean Taylor recruited elite scientists and innovative clinicians, who with our strong student outcomes, propelled our school into the Top 20 pharmacy schools nationwide in record time.

Dean Jim McKerrow then took the reins and steered us through our adolescence, establishing many more formal and long-term administrative structures, supporting our faculty as they became more established and integrated throughout the university and surrounding areas, and growing our footprint in drug discovery and drug development, including overseeing the launch of new research organizations, the Drug Development Pipeline, and our Master's degree in Drug Development and Product Management.

The differences from the beginning of our school to now are striking. Some changes are at the very basic level, such as we originally hauled classroom supplies by hand carts all over the undergraduate campus to teach in whatever miscellaneous temporary trailers had an open classroom. That's a far cry from our current Health Sciences Education Center auditorium and classrooms that host both pharmacy and medical student trainees within the Skaggs pharmacy school education and research building.

A broader change with far-reaching implications has been the exponential pace of knowledge growth over the past two decades. This has touched every aspect of our program, from research productivity to novel educational strategies to digital patient care delivery, such that our curriculum, our clinical programs and our research foci have tremendously progressed and evolved.

Q. As you begin your tenure as dean, what's on your to-do list? What are your priorities?

A. Now that our school is well established, my goals are to plan for our continued long-term improvement and success. This will include establishing permanent departments for stable infrastructure, identifying new collaborators and partners across campus, across the local community and beyond, connecting with and celebrating the successes of our alumni, and developing support systems to grow our existing successful programs and launch groundbreaking new educational, clinical and research initiatives.

Our faculty, staff, students and alumni are stellar. My hope is to provide them the requisite support and spark of inspiration at SSPPS so they lead transformational changes in our health care systems, our approaches to discovery and drug therapy, and improvements to the health of communities worldwide.

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