Opportunity knocks in pharm-tox for DeLeo

July 1 was my 20th anniversary here,” says Joyce DeLeo, Ph.D. A DMS pain researcher, she is the new chair of the Department of Pharmacology and Toxicology. But when she arrived at Dartmouth as a postdoctoral fellow in 1988, DeLeo “assumed I’d be here only a few years.”

Instead, she joined the faculty in 1991 and has distinguished herself ever since as a researcher and a leader. She was a fellow in the Hedwig van Ameringen Executive Leadership in Academic Medicine Program in 2001-02 and acting department chair in 2002-03.

Endowed: She became the inaugural director of Dartmouth’s Neuroscience Center in 2002. She helped establish an interdisciplinary Ph.D. program in experimental and molecular medicine. She received Dartmouth’s first Graduate Faculty Mentoring Award in 2004. And in 2005 she was appointed to an endowed chair—DMS’s Irene Heinz Given Professorship of Pharmacology.

In her newest role, DeLeo succeeds longtime department chair Ethan Dmitrovsky, M.D., who recently received the American Cancer Society’s top research award. It was a requirement of accepting it that he step down as chair. He’ll be devoting his time to his research on lung cancer, as well as to mentoring young scientists and traveling for speaking engagements.

Field: Dmitrovsky calls DeLeo “an outstanding educator and person of science. She is an internationally recognized scholar in her field,” he adds, “and a proven administrator.”

One of the key challenges facing DeLeo will be helping the department find ways to counteract the decline in funding from the National Institutes of Health (NIH). One option may be to partner with biotech and drug companies. DeLeo holds several patents, has served on scientific advisory boards, and was involved in the start-up of a pharmaceutical firm. “I thought with my background I could help the faculty think beyond the NIH paradigm,” she says.

Her other goals include recruiting three new faculty members; better integrating the department, which is split between the Hanover and Lebanon campuses; and continuing to mentor faculty and students and support DMS’s teaching mission. The department’s breadth of research—especially in cancer, toxicology, and cardiovascular science—is great for teaching, for recruiting students, and for research collaborations, she says.

DeLeo will continue her own research on the neuroimmunology of chronic pain and translation of the results into ways to prevent and treat pain. She serves on numerous international review boards, NIH study sections, and editorial boards.

Fulbright: She earned a B.S. in biology and chemistry at the State University of New York at Albany in 1982 and a Ph.D. in pharmacology at the University of Oklahoma in 1988. She did predoctoral research as a Fulbright Scholar at the Max Planck Institute of Psychiatry in Martinsried, West Germany, and two postdoctoral fellowships—in neuroscience at Harvard and in anesthesiology at Dartmouth.

DeLeo won’t have any problem keeping busy in the coming year, as she is also serving on the search committee for the new president of Dartmouth College.

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