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best way to manage these patients, to optimize their therapy, to monitor their progress.”

About half of the pharmacists are in the room with the lecturer in Baltimore and the rest participate by phone or video conference, Roffman said. Several of the pharmacists live in Florida, one of six states where XLHealth operates its Medicare Advantage special needs plan, dubbed Care Improvement Plus.

“We try to make it as interactive as possible,” Roffman said of the training sessions.

He said the XLHealth pharmacists are seasoned practitioners, many of whom have had some experience in clinically focused settings.

“They have the sophistication of experience to allow them to focus in on where the important problems are—much more than a student would be able to. So they know what the routine issues in practice are and the challenges, to some extent, of what it takes to change behaviors in practitioners. That’s no easy task,” Roffman said.

His goal for the pharmacists is to give them the confidence and skills “to push the envelope of pharmaceutical care in the real world.”

For a patient with heart failure, he said, that could mean persuading prescribers to use β -blockers and angiotensin-converting-enzyme (ACE) inhibitors aggressively to get the best possible response.

“Most heart failure patients are on those drugs. But they are on a small dose, and the physician is satisfied that they’re doing OK, and they’ll leave it alone,” Roffman said. “But in order to really optimize therapy you have to try to push the ACE inhibitors toward the target doses in the large, well-controlled trials and not just leave them on some piddling dose.”

Another intervention for such a patient might be to contact the prescribing physician about adding an aldosterone antagonist to the medication regimen, because clinical trials have demonstrated the therapy improves survival

and decreases the risk of hospitalization, Roffman said.

“This . . . level of intervention where you really try to be the initiator of optimization of therapy rather than the responder to an already-written prescription is kind of a different level of practice than most pharmacists are involved in,” Roffman said. He said XLHealth wants its pharmacists to take that type of approach to Care Improvement Plus enrollees’ therapy.

Enrollees in the special needs plan are, on average, 76 years old take 8–10 medications for chronic conditions, and have 11 different health care providers, Hershey said. Many of the approximately 71,000 enrollees are dually eligible for Medicare and Medicaid, and most lack a high-school education. The plan serves patients in Arkansas, Georgia, Maryland, Missouri, South Carolina, and Texas.

Special needs Medicare Advantage plans were authorized in the Medicare Modernization Act of 2003. The plans provide coordinated care for beneficiaries who are institutionalized, dually eligible

for Medicare and Medicaid, or suffer from severe or disabling chronic conditions.

Nearly 1.3 million Medicare beneficiaries, including almost 1 million dual eligibles, were enrolled in a special needs plan in March, according to Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services data.

“There’s a tremendous opportunity here for medication therapy management” in the special-needs population, Hershey said.

Roffman said he thinks the university’s partnership with XLHealth is unusual and provides “a wonderful opportunity for pharmacy as a profession” to work with the private sector.

He said he is scheduling other faculty members through the end of the year to lead training sessions on diabetes, asthma, depression, palliative care, end-of-life care, gastroesophageal reflux disease, constipation, dementia, Alzheimer’s disease, sleep disorders, osteoporosis, and falls.

—Kate Traynor

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News Briefs

• **Melissa Murer Corrigan** in April received Drake University’s Lawrence C. and Delores M. Weaver Medal of Honor and delivered the lecture “Making a Difference.” Corrigan is the executive director and chief executive officer of the Pharmacy Technician Certification Board in Washington, D.C. The medal—the highest honor presented by Drake’s College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences—recognizes a person’s dedication to and impact on the pharmacy profession. Corrigan is a 1989 graduate of the college.

• The **Association of Black Health-System Pharmacists** (ABHP) in May presented the inaugural Mickey Leland Political Achievement Award to U.S. Representative Sheila Jackson Lee of

Texas. Named for pharmacist and six-term U.S. Representative George Thomas “Mickey” Leland of Texas, the award recognizes an individual, a team of individuals, or an organization that personifies Leland’s spirit and whose work in political and legislative affairs furthers the interests of ABHP and pharmacists in general and will have a major impact on the community at large. Leland died in 1989 in an aircraft crash while traveling in his role as chairman of the House Select Committee on Hunger to a United Nations refugee camp near the Sudan–Ethiopia border. ABHP selected Jackson Lee, who hails from the same congressional district as Leland, for the award because of her “adamant” support of health care reform legislation as well as civil rights and immigration issues.