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## Program Coordinator Works Year-Round on Annual Botanicals Conference

Event draws participants from around the globe

APRIL 15, 2014 BY BARBARA LAGO AND ERIN GARRETT



Jennifer Taylor

OXFORD, Miss. – If the 13th annual **International Conference on the Science of Botanicals** is as successfully staged as the previous 12, it will be due, in large measure, to the efforts of Jennifer S. Taylor, program coordinator in the **National Center for Natural Products Research** at the University of Mississippi School of Pharmacy.

Putting the ICSB together “is a huge undertaking,” said Ikhlas Khan, NCNPR’s assistant director and director of its FDA (Food and Drug Administration) Center for Excellence in Botanicals.

“It’s sort of like putting together a jigsaw puzzle with thousands of pieces,” he said. “Jennifer makes sure that, in the end, all those pieces fit together perfectly to ensure that everything comes off without a hitch.”

The conference has drawn as many as 250 participants from around the world to the Oxford Conference Center to discuss pressing topics affecting the botanical dietary supplement industry and the people who consume the supplements. Taylor’s job is to prepare year-round for each upcoming conference.

“I am the ‘event coordinator,’ ‘travel coordinator,’ ‘administrative coordinator’ and ‘speaker coordinator’ all rolled into one,” Taylor said. “My role is pretty intense.”

Taylor arranges venues and menus for the conference’s various activities and ensures that whoever needs to get paid for them receives payment. She manages hotel arrangements and shuttle services for conference participants and even helps some of them solve their flight issues. She also handles invitations and other correspondence with conference speakers and manages their itineraries and travel reimbursements.

During the actual event, she deals with the registration, check-in and other problems that invariably arise whenever and wherever large numbers of people gather for a series of carefully orchestrated events.

“Her job is like herding stray cats, but somehow she does it very well,” said Larry Walker, NCNPR director. “She manages to assist many of our NCNPR staff as well as many of our conference participants.”

This year, Taylor’s workload is even more intense because NCNPR also is hosting the **American Society of Pharmacognosy’s** annual meeting Aug. 2-4.

“We will be challenged this year because the ASP event is much larger than our ICSB,” she said. “It averages 500 attendees, but we have an amazing group of people at NCNPR, and everyone will pull together to really make this year a huge success.”

Topics for this year’s April 15-17 ICSB conference include various approaches for post-market surveillance, risk and safety assessment, and adverse event reporting for botanical dietary supplements and other natural products. To ensure that regulatory and manufacturing perspectives are shared, the program includes presentations from members of the FDA’s Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition, major trade associations and industry representatives, Taylor said.

The ASP meeting will explore natural products and their impact on human health, agriculture and the environment.

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"Participants will review, discuss and explore the confluence of natural products research," Taylor said. "Topics include past achievements, current status and future prospects in natural products discovery."

While in the midst of finalizing agendas and plans for the ICSB event and beginning similar work on the ASP meeting, Taylor also is serving as Khan's administrative assistant.

"He oversees approximately 30 people at any given time, so I assist them, as well as him, with any clerical needs they have, such as travel, purchasing, correspondence, payroll, reimbursements, etc.," she said.

A Myrtle native, Taylor joined the NCNPR staff in fall 2006.

"I worked for Dr. Mahmoud ElSohly at the NIDA Marijuana Project," she said. "At the NIDA project, I was a senior secretary working with project coordinator Linda Spears. She taught me a lot about the project and my job duties. A lot of my success should be credited to her."

Taylor began working for Khan in summer 2010.

"That's when I became a program coordinator," she said. "I still do the clerical jobs of a senior secretary, but I help coordinate an international conference too. It takes a lot of us working together to be successful."

Working with all those people, as well as being allowed to grow in work-related knowledge and responsibilities, are the aspects of the job that Taylor likes most.

"There are so many wonderful individuals that I get the pleasure of interacting with every day," she said. "Even though our group tends to change frequently with visiting scholars and postdocs coming and going, we are like an enormous family. When someone leaves, we try to keep in touch with (him or her).

"I have been fortunate to work for two amazing bosses, Dr. Mahmoud ElSohly and Dr. Ikhlas Khan. They both have inspired me to be the best at what I do."

The annual ICSB is supported by a cooperative agreement between the NCNPR and the FDA Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition.

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