



An Interview with Mary Lynn McPherson, PharmD, MA, MDE, BCPS, FAAHPM

Thank you for agreeing to this interview, Dr. McPherson. You have accomplished so much in your professional career, but I'd like to focus on your role at the University of Maryland, Baltimore.

Q: How long have you been a professor and executive director of advanced postgraduate education in palliative care in the Department of Pharmacy Practice and Science at the University of Maryland School of Pharmacy in Baltimore?

A: I've been faculty at the University of Maryland School of Pharmacy since 1990, and I have served as executive director for advanced postgraduate education in palliative care since 2016.

Q: Who are the graduate programs in palliative care intended for?

A: The palliative care graduate programs at the University of Maryland, Baltimore were designed to meet the educational needs of individuals who are currently working in hospice and palliative care and want to gain a deeper understanding of the physical, psychological, spiritual, and social needs of patients and families affected by advanced illness, or healthcare professionals who wish to start working in this field. We also have a nice cohort of individuals who practice in a related area such as critical care, geriatrics, or oncology who just want to garner additional skills in palliative care.

Q: What graduate palliative care programs are offered through the University of Maryland, Baltimore?

A: We offer four graduate certificate programs (Principles and Practice of Hospice and Palliative Care, Clinical Hospice and Palliative Care, Leadership and Administration in Hospice and Palliative Care, and Psychosocial/Spiritual Aspects of Hospice and Palliative Care), a master of science (MS) degree, and a doctor of philosophy (PhD) in palliative care.

Q: Can you tell me about program eligibility and completion requirements?

A: Individuals with a bachelor's degree or higher are eligible for the graduate certificates and MS. Each graduate certificate is comprised of four courses (12 academic credits). The MS requires completion of 30 credits (10 courses), and most graduates also earn two graduate certificates along the way. The MS degree can be completed in two academic years; learners take one course at a time, and each course is eight weeks long. The program is designed for the busy, working adult.

The PhD in palliative care program is the first of its kind in the United States. Eligibility includes completion of an MS degree in palliative care or a master's degree or higher in a relevant field (e.g., MD, PharmD, NP, DNP, PA, MBA, etc.) plus experience in palliative care. The program requires the completion of 36 academic credits, including eight courses and 12 credits of dissertation work.

Q: Are the programs offered by the University of Maryland only for nurses?



A: The graduate studies programs are designed for a wide range of healthcare professionals, including but not limited to:

- Physicians
- Administrators
- Pharmacists
- Social workers
- Nurses
- Chaplains
- Advanced practice nurses
- Counselors
- Physician assistants
- Bereavement specialists
- Therapists
- Volunteer coordinators
- Psychologists
- Thanatologists

And more!

Q: I am very impressed that it is available to so many professionals! What about the faculty—are they also interprofessional?

A: Absolutely. The university takes pride in having nationally recognized, interprofessional faculty that mirror the diverse interprofessional learners.

Q: What is the timeframe for completion, and how long are the semesters?

A: A graduate certificate can be completed in two semesters. The MS degree can be completed in six semesters (two academic years), and the PhD can be completed in three to four years. All semesters are eight weeks long: two eight-week semesters in the “fall,” two eight-week semesters in the “spring,” and one eight-week semester in the “summer.”

Q: How can prospective students get more information on applications or specific programs in palliative care?

A: For more information, or to be contacted, they can email palliative@umaryland.edu or call 410-706-PALL (7255). Our website for more information is graduate.umaryland.edu/palliative.

Q: Is there anything else you’d like to share?

A: Our programs are 100% online and offer asynchronous learning, so participants can structure their time to suit their schedules and circumstances. Students thrive in the interprofessional environment, often commenting that they learn as much from each other as they do from the faculty! One of our favorite compliments is how PRACTICAL the education is. Students say repeatedly, “I learned this Monday night, and Tuesday I used it at work!”