

## Interview with Dr. Rustem S. Medora: Professor Emeritus of Pharmacy (1967 – 2002)

**1. How did you decide to become a pharmacist and a teacher?**

*My mother was an avid gardener & she would point to some of the plants in the garden and tell me their uses & their medicinal properties. So, after high school, when I asked my counselor where I could learn about the science behind the properties of plants, he did not have a good answer. A family friend suggested I should talk to someone in the School of Pharmacy. When I talked to an advisor in the pharmacy school, he said that all pharmacists learn about plants under the subject "Pharmacognosy." So, inadvertently I became a pharmacist, although that was not my intent. Sadly, Pharmacognosy is taught in schools of pharmacy in the U.S. only as an elective.*

**2. Pharmacognosy is called the mother of pharmacy because it deals with the extraction of drugs from natural resources, everything from animals to minerals and plants to microorganisms. Can you list some of pharmacognosy classes and seminars you taught while at UM?**

*Medicinal Plants of the Amazon; Medicinal Plants in Montana Forests: A Sustainable Resource; Ethnobotany of American Indians; Modern Uses of Medicinal Plants Used in the Ayurvedic System of Medicine; Use of Herbs in Geriatric Practice; Putting a New Plant Drug on the Market in America; Legislation that Affects Botanical Products and Their Use in the U.S.; Epidemiology and Pharmacology of Abused Substances; Herbal Drugs: Their Adverse Effects and Interactions With Conventional Drug Therapy; Herbal Therapy and the Cardiac Patient; Herbs and Women's Health.*

**3. Tell us about some of your significant discoveries that came about through your research on native plants.**

*I can't name any one great discovery, but I've worked on proteases from papaya tissue cultures, and I've worked with Prof Keith Parker & others on plants like feverfew and products from cannabis as possible treatments for migraine headaches.*

**4. Where is the most interesting place you've conducted field research? What did you find there?**

*I've collected plants in the Peruvian Amazon, Costa Rica, Belize, Nepal and Japan, and I've given lectures in many of those countries. Some of the plants I observed in South America had hallucinogenic properties, which was pretty interesting.*

**5. Tell us about some of the advocacy work you've accomplished at UM.**

*The major advocacy work that I've done was with Dean David Forbes (& later with Assistant Dean Lori Morin) applying for grants to train Native Americans to become pharmacists. There were no Native pharmacists in Montana when we started & now we have around 70 Native pharmacists who are graduates of the UM School of Pharmacy. Together we started Health Careers Opportunities Program (HCOP) in the early 1990's by applying for a federal grant four times. We were turned down the first three times, but the fourth time we "struck gold." HCOP led us to funding for the Native American Center of Excellence. The two grants made the School of Pharmacy eligible to apply for funds to remodel the Skaggs Building and add the north end. This helped us receive approximately \$8 million towards the remodel of the building.*

**6. What are some of the highlights of your teaching career, working with both PharmD and BMED students?**

*When I started teaching at UM School of Pharmacy, there were only 7 faculty - including the Dean. The school offered only bachelors & master's degrees in pharmacy. The Pharm.D. & Ph.D. degrees were introduced much later. Because of the shortage of faculty, most of us had to teach in all disciplines and most often we team-taught. The field trips I took with students to Oregon, Washington & countries abroad were some of my teaching highlights.*

**7. What will you miss most from your time here at UM?**

*What I will miss most is the interaction with students and faculty. A good number of senior Pharmacy Practice faculty were my students!*

**8. Can you give us a picture of your arrival at UM in 1967?**

*After graduate school, I had a temporary position at Idaho State for a year. My wife and I came to love this area, so I approached the Dean of Pharmacy at UM and asked if there might be a job for a research professor like me. Meanwhile, I secured a post-doctoral fellowship at McGill University (Montreal) in the Botany Department. One fine day I got a phone call asking me to interview & meet the faculty at UM. It was the middle of winter, and after changing planes half a dozen times, I landed in Missoula – which was a very small city back then. The interview went well, and a couple months later I was offered the job. I said yes and applied to be a permanent resident of the United States. I waited and waited for my visa, but it never came. Finally, I was told my application had been lost, and I'd have to apply all over again. There wasn't time! The Dean contacted his good friend, Mike Mansfield, who was serving in the Senate, and the visa came right away. So, in the middle of November, my wife, our 3-month-old son and I got into our car with all of our belongings and started driving towards Montana. When we were in North Dakota, our son got really sick, and we had to take him to the hospital. He recovered, and we continued on our way. Back then, the pass over the Continental Divide was a one lane road, and it was covered in ice. We literally slid into Butte. It was dark at 4:34 pm when we got to the other side, and my wife said she wasn't going any farther. We ended up staying in a hotel. When we finally arrived at our apartment in Missoula, we didn't have furniture, so we slept on the floor... happy just to have a roof over our heads. The next day the Dean called me in and said he'd gone to a lot of trouble to bring me to UM, so he was going to pay me \$300 more than the last person he'd hired. Guess what was offered as my starting annual salary? \$8,700, with the raise.*

**9. What are some of the community activities you became involved with in Missoula?**

*I was the president of the Missoula Mendelssohn Club (an all-male Choir) between 1982 & 1985. In 1985, our Choir Director Dr. Don Carey decided to take us to the International Choral Festival in Nancy, France. When we returned, our group said we should create a similar festival in Missoula. With that in mind, we held our first International Choral Festival in 1987. I helped with the first festival and remained on the board from 1987 through 2005.*

*When one of the indigenous species of Echinacea angustifolia was threatened with extinction, Governor Mark Roscoe appointed a Governor's Task Force on Wild Medicinal Plants (1999—2002). Thanks to our recommendations, the plant now thrives in E. Montana.*

*One of the most significant efforts I put into action was to bring Elderhostel to Montana. University of Montana was the first campus west of the Mississippi to bring Elderhostel to the*

*Montana public. It has thrived ever since under different management and is now known as the "Road Scholar."*

*In 1996, Beth Judy and I started the MTPR radio show known as "The Plant Detective." We worked together until 2003. It was later broadcast by PBS across the nation.*

**10. Do you have any plans for your life post-UM?**

*Since retiring, I've remained active in campus life by giving guest lectures, leading UC Medicinal Plant Garden Tours, founding the Montana Osher Life Long Learning Institute (MOLLI) in collaboration with Dean Sharon Alexander, co-directing the Native American Center of Excellence & Diversity Programs, and starting the Intergenerational Summer School for kids & grandparents, etc.*

*At 87 there is not much more I can do & so I plan to move to a retirement community close to my two children & three grandchildren on the West Coast. Needless to say, I'll participate in the activities of the retirement home. I might get involved with the Leach Botanical Garden in Portland, OR.*

**11. Please share with us why you created the Medora Family Scholarship and what you hope to accomplish with it.**

*For 55 years, UM & the Missoula Community have done a lot for me & my family. The Medora Family Scholarship is our way of giving back a small token to the community that did so much for us. My hope is that others will want to contribute to the fund so we can make it an endowed scholarship that serves the needs of students for a long time to come.*