The determination of Pfizer’s Dr. Freda Lewis-Hall has enabled her to find a ray of hope in every situation she’s encountered, from glass ceilings, to patients’ bedsides, to the challenges facing pharma today.
MEMORABLE MOMENTS

One such opportunity for Lewis-Hall to help people occurred after her residency, when she worked for the National Health Services Corps in the Virgin Islands. “I was in a health manpower shortage area, helping people that wouldn’t have otherwise had psychiatric care at that point,” she says.

During this time, psychiatry was undergoing a major shift towards taking patients out of hospitals and mainstreaming them back into their communities, and places like the Virgin Islands had no provisions in place for the treatment of psychiatric conditions. Lewis-Hall recalls, “I thought it was concrete and lead-lined, so Superwoman couldn’t even see through it with her X-ray vision. I don’t know who was nice enough to call it glass, but it wasn’t me.” But even this experience was something her supportive family, with its mantra of positivity, spun into gold from straw: “I went home that evening and told my mother, “We’re going to take the best colleges list and start at the top and apply until the money runs out.” And so the two women sat down together and applied to the most prestigious schools out there—Harvard, Yale, Brown, Johns Hopkins—shunning society’s expectations for women to accomplish the very least, defiantly aiming instead for the very best. Lewis-Hall ended up earning her undergraduate degree in Natural Sciences from The Johns Hopkins University in large part because it was close to her Maryland home, and because, “I wanted to be a doctor, so where else but Johns Hopkins?”

Currently, says Lewis-Hall, that concrete ceiling “is being chipped away. Now around our [industry’s] tables as part of our leadership teams are people who look different from each other—we come from different backgrounds, we have different perspectives that allow for robust decision-making and sharing. I don’t think it’s gone by any stretch of the imagination, but it’s coming down; it’s more porous. The value of complementary leadership is being seen by women who have gotten through the cracks in the concrete ceiling and by men who have realized that this is much better in a lot of ways.”

After college, Lewis-Hall was faced with another choice that would become a stepping stone on her journey to becoming a doctor: getting into medical school. She was working at the time for the Federal Power Commission in Washington, DC, when she told her mother she wanted to attend Howard University Hospital and College of Medicine. Her mother replied, “Isn’t that right up the street from where you’re working? You should go over there and ask them if you can be in their medical school.”

“I said to my mother, ‘That’s not how it works; you don’t just walk in and ask someone if you can be in their medical school,’” recalls Lewis-Hall. Nevertheless, she walked over on her lunch break one day and filled out the application, and was accepted for the upcoming school year. Was the decision to become a doctor based on it being a lucrative career? A way to provide solutions to public health challenges? The draw of the mix of policy and medicine? “That all sounds so profound,” says Lewis-Hall. “I just … wanted to help people.”
such a shift. “I was in Washington, DC, doing work at St. Elizabeth’s Hospital, and I realized that the people hospitalized there were likely going to be deinstitutionalized and sent back to the Virgin Islands, and there wasn’t anyone or anything that was going to provide care,” says Lewis-Hall.

Eventually, she went on to serve as acting medical director for the US Virgin Islands Department of Health. “I went down to try and help evolve the system so it could meet the needs of those chronically mentally ill patients, and it was a very, very profound experience,” she says. “Going to the Virgin Islands, where there was just little or nothing, was a really shocking learning experience.”

After leaving the Virgin Islands, Lewis-Hall returned to Howard, where she learned even more about psychiatry while counseling patients and serving as vice chair and assistant professor. “I loved what was happening in psychiatry, and I was drawn to it,” she says. “Psychiatry at that time was still grounded in understanding people, in listening. It was really a listening profession at that time, and I loved the idea of being taught to professionally listen.” That skill—the capacity to evaluate carefully what others are saying—is often missing in the conventional list of leadership traits, but Lewis-Hall has been careful to cultivate it in making her way up the professional ladder.

Lewis-Hall’s work at Howard also got her interested in the biology behind psychiatry. “I became fascinated with brain biology and learning—learning what was being learned. I think it’s also part of what got me ready to come into the [pharma] industry,” she says.

**DIVERSITY, BIOLOGY, AND ELI LILLY**

Lewis-Hall’s first foray into the pharma industry was at Eli Lilly, where she began as clinical research physician and, over a period of eight years, moved her way up the ranks, creating and directing the Lilly Center for Women’s Health and then serving as product team leader.

While we all recognize that diversity can play a role in our lives in cultural and philosophical ways—from civil rights to workplace equality—Lewis-Hall began to understand during her time at Lilly that diversity may have biological and physiological roles to play as well. “I spent some time on gender-based health, gender-based biology, and ethnopsychopharmacology—looking at the differences that race and ethnicity made and how these things affect the way that drugs are metabolized in different people,” she explains.

Such interests led to Lewis-Hall developing and directing the Lilly Center for Women’s Health, aimed at incorporating science-based, gender-related advantages into all life-cycle stages of Lilly’s neuroscience, cardiovascular, and women’s health therapies. “That was a time when there wasn’t a lot of thought about gender-based research,” she says. “So my first few years in the industry were really great in that they confirmed the power of science for bringing benefit to patients and provided me with an opportunity to really connect with the community around a health issue.”

In fact, diversity issues played a role in Lewis-Hall’s career not only in the research she was working on at Lilly, but—throughout her entire personal development as well. “Sometimes I have a hard time teasing apart what my ethnicity and my gender bring to the table, although I am not at all confused about the fact that there is a significant impact,” she says. “I think there were times when I felt that maybe my credibility was challenged in a way that it might not have been … As a young, female, African-American physician, I had to wonder if I carried the same weight—had the same gravitas—that someone else might have.”

Thankfully, Lewis-Hall had a mentor to look to at Lilly, Dr. August “Gus” Watanabe, who oversaw Lilly’s research labs. “He reminded me over and over that at the end of the day, I am a physician, trained in the art of healing,” she recalls. “He told me to never forget that my grounding at the company was that I brought patient-centeredness into the room with me—that when I walk into the room, someone who has touched a patient, treated a patient, and understands the patient is now here representing that; the patient walks in with me.”
Sound advice like this is what helped Lewis-Hall realize that diversity in the workplace was not just something that might or might not bring her credibility into question, but something to be celebrated and leveraged, using each person’s strengths and differences to contribute to the greater good of the company.

Sidney Taurel, former CEO of Lilly, had this to say about Lewis-Hall: “Freda is one of the most energetic, communicative, and driven people I’ve worked with. She combines competence as a physician with a passion to make a difference in peoples’ lives as a leader, a mentor, and an advocate. With her infectious enthusiasm, she is good fun to be around.”

### Patient Focus at Pfizer

That patient-centeredness and respect for diversity has transferred to Lewis-Hall’s current role as chief medical officer (CMO) of Pfizer. “At the end of the day, I believe we as a company are accountable for the safe, effective, and appropriate use of our medicines,” she says. “This is a really good opportunity for us to live our word that the patients are at the center of what we do.”

Being at Pfizer—where she administers a division budget of more than $600 million annually—has given Lewis-Hall time to reflect on why she transitioned from direct patient care into the private sector and the pharma industry: “What attracted me to it and what ultimately won me and kept me is the idea that probably the most incredible science ever happens in this environment,” she says. “It’s a data-rich environment where you have the ability to help not just one patient at a time, but millions of patients at a time. I would never, ever have guessed that this was what I’d be doing now.”

Part of the way Lewis-Hall keeps her focus on the patients through her work at Pfizer is by stressing the importance of clinical trials. “If medicines are going to be evolved so that they properly serve the people that are going to use them, then the globalization of our clinical trial effort is critical,” she explains. Pfizer is the only pharmaceutical company to be accredited by the Association for the Accreditation of Human Research Protection Programs (AAHRPP) for ensuring the protection of human subjects taking part in early-stage clinical trials.

Finally, Lewis-Hall notes how important her role is as industry representative on the new federal Patient Centered Outcomes Research Institute’s (PCORI) governing board, which will fund studies to evaluate the clinical effectiveness among the patient population of drugs and other medical treatments. “It is a striking opportunity to really be able to focus on patient-centered outcomes with a group of people that are dedicated to that task. And I’m especially excited because pharma’s there at the table.”

As CMO of Pfizer, as well as being an Executive Officer and member of the senior leadership team, Lewis-Hall is one of the highest-ranking women in the industry. (And best paid, with a $4.5 million total pay package last year.) Lewis-Hall has tackled the highly sensitive issue of increasing the effectiveness of internal systems for collection and reporting of adverse events, particularly through the integration of Wyeth’s safety reporting system with Pfizer’s—a complicated process that was completed ahead of schedule.

Reflecting on her own leadership role at Pfizer, Lewis-Hall recognizes that a certain skill set and leadership style is necessary in dealing with the uncertainty in the industry going forward. “I think the more mature you are as a leader, the better able you are to manage uncertain or ambiguous environments, because that’s what’s required,” she says. She believes that a new form of leadership—quite the opposite of the old “command and control” model—is required now, “which isn’t, ‘Do what I told you to do,’ but ‘Do what you think you should do.’”

Looking beyond her current role, to what else she’d like to accomplish professionally, Lewis-Hall says, “Introducing new treatments and new preventions is part of it, but I think that our ability to serve in a broader way and to really change the face of global health is really profound.

“I think Pfizer has a lot of experience, and we’re doing a lot of good work in this space,” she says. “I would love personally to become more involved in that and to apply the medical community of Pfizer to this work in a bigger way.”

### Industry Perspective

Lewis-Hall’s many years as a physician and industry expert have given her the multi-

Trips such as this to Ethiopia helped Lewis-Hall begin to shape her thoughts on the future, where she sees an opportunity to “serve in a broader way and to really change the face of global health.”
faceted perspective she needs to understand the complicated changes facing the industry today, from health reform to patent cliffs to R&D cost concerns. “We deal with this uncertainty every day, and I like to think that we do it well,” she says. “We strive for the right amount of information to support our decisions. And for me, that’s the trick in senior leadership—making sure that you’ve asked all the right questions and that you’ve pushed to acquire as much of the information as you need to make a good decision.”

From her vantage point at Pfizer, Lewis-Hall can see the industry shifting, and recognizes collaboration as the only possible solution to the new problems it’s faced with. “When I look at what I came into in 1994 [at Lilly] and what we look like as an industry now in 2011, I feel that we’ve changed in a very profound way,” she explains. “It used to be that we went down in the basement by ourselves with our best scientists and had a ‘eureka!’ moment—finding something that was going to cure something—and then came to the light of day and sold it. That’s not happening anymore. Now it’s all hands on deck. It’s partnerships with other big companies, with small companies, with academic institutions, with nonprofit organizations. This is an ecosystem for problem-solving around the still vexing issues that face us.” Lewis-Hall told Pharm Exec that being able to reach out to a range of new stakeholders is going to be a critical skill for the next generation of industry leaders. “We are already seeing it in the actions of individual company CEOs.”

ADVICE FOR FUTURE LEADERS
Mentoring has always been a natural part of Lewis-Hall’s personal and professional life, and in that way she is well suited for the role of HBA Woman of the Year, to offer advice to the future female leaders of pharma.

In addition to leadership through listening, one piece of advice that Lewis-Hall received from Sandro Franchi, a former HR employee at Lilly, has stayed with her, and she often passes it on to others: Think of your career in terms of your pinnacle role. “When I mentor people I always ask, ‘What do you want your last job, your pinnacle role, to be—the place from which you will be able to make the greatest impact?’” she says. Once you can figure that out, she says, all the career moves you make from then on should be stepping stones that will lead to your pinnacle role. “This isn’t about where you will have the greatest glory, the biggest title, or the most money. People should tag where they believe they can have the greatest impact and then begin to accumulate the skills, behaviors, and experience that will allow them to have that impact.”

Lewis-Hall’s mentoring and leadership skills—along with her patient care and industry experiences—make her ideal to represent the HBA in a more turbulent era of transition from the traditional business model. “I think women leaders already have a running start on the kind of leadership that’s required to run such a complicated ecosystem of different interests,” she says. “We’re collaborative leaders, we are motivational leaders, we’re about relationships. These are all the kinds of things that are perfectly positioned to advance women to solve the problems that are facing us—the ones that are facing us as businesses, but also as a global community around healthcare.” Is there a next step in this record of success? “I intend to stay committed to the path of public health and to do what I can to ensure the private sector is there in full, to meet the needs of all patients worldwide through better access and more treatments.”

“What attracted me to [pharma] and what ultimately won me and kept me is the idea that probably the most incredible science happens in this environment. It’s a data-rich environment where you have the ability to help not just one patient at a time, but millions of patients at a time.”