Meharry leader goes full time

Cherrie Epps to continue in top post as former president opts not to return

By Tom Wilemon
The Tennessean

Interim is no longer part of Cherrie Epps’ job title.

The longtime member of Meharry Medical College’s leadership team is now its president and chief executive officer. The college quietly named her to replace Dr. Wayne Riley, who chose not to return after taking a sabbatical in May.

Epps, who is 83, had served as interim president since his departure.

She takes over at a challenging time for the institution. The future of its primary teaching hospital remains uncertain. And the college, which is affiliated with the United Methodist Church, has been hit by a series of federal lawsuits over the past year accusing it of discrimination against religious and ethnic minorities.

A year ago, the Metro Nashville Hospital Authority board announced it was considering ending inpatient services at the city’s safety-net hospital because of decreasing volume. It released a report showing that Nashville General Hospital was admitting only 11 patients a day — patients who increasingly were unable to pay for their care at a time when federal, state and Metro governments had cut back on subsidies.

Riley challenged the findings of the report from Atlanta-based Alvarez & Marsal, commissioned another study to look

» MEHARRY, GB
Meharry faces many challenges

MEHARRY FACTS
- Established in 1876 as the South's first medical school for African-Americans
- Has medical, dental and graduate schools
- Home to Robert Wood Johnson for Health Policy at Meharry
- Admits 125 medical students, 30 residents and 55 dental students each year
- 2012-13 student body: 665 African-Americans, 82 Asians, 36 whites, 33 Hispanics and two Native Americans

Source: Meharry Medical College website

Longtime leader

Epps has been a member of the college's leadership for more than 15 years, including a stint as interim president in 2007 before Riley arrived. This time, she takes the helm when the college is scheduled for a 2013-14 survey by the Liaison Committee on Medical Education, the accrediting body for medical schools.

Epps has a Ph.D. in zoology from Howard University. She has published articles in The New England Journal of Medicine, The Lancet and the Journal of the National Medical Association. She has worked at Meharry since 1994.

"As interim president and now president of the college, she has been overseeing the accreditation processes and our construction projects, as well as the ongoing conversations about Nashville General Hospital," Caldwell said. "Meharry Medical College continues to flourish and grow under Dr. Epps' leadership. Change is inevitable in any organization, including institutions of higher learning like Meharry. It contributes to growth, new ideas and innovation."

While the inpatient census at Nashville General has continued to decline, the volume of its outpatient and emergency services has trended "slightly upward," said Rosemary Plomin, a spokesperson for the Metro Nashville Hospital Authority. The hospital has

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