WCMC-Q celebrates ten years of excellence in education, research and clinical care.
The sweet smell of success

Researchers investigate the olfactory systems of desert animals to gain insights into the process of evolution
Currently, there are 347 million people worldwide who have diabetes mellitus, Dr. Ravinder Mamtani, associate dean for global and public health at WCMC-Q, told a diabetes awareness forum hosted at Hamad General Hospital in Doha.

The statistics for Qatar are not much better, Dr. Mamtani said, where nearly 17 percent of the population have diabetes and a third of sufferers are unaware that they have diabetes.

He was addressing the World Diabetes Day 2012 symposium that is observed worldwide on November 14. The theme of the symposium for this year was ‘Let’s Protect Our Future’.

Individuals with a family history of diabetes and high blood pressure are most at risk for the development of diabetes, Dr. Mamtani said. In addition, obesity, lack of exercise and an unhealthy diet are also major contributing factors especially for persons aged over 45.

“Seventy percent of diabetes risk is attributable to being overweight and 90 percent of diabetics are overweight,” Dr. Mamtani said. “Losing weight reduces the risk of diabetes or results in its remission. Overweight individuals who lose even small amounts of weight, like 10 pounds, will find their medical condition improve, progression of diabetes slowed or its symptoms disappear. This can be achieved by regular exercise and appropriate dietary changes.”

In his opening address to the high-profile gathering of medical and academic staff, the assistant professor of medicine and head of endocrinology at Hamad General Hospital, Dr. Mahmoud Zirie, highlighted the problems associated with diabetes and the urgent need to educate the general public about its risk and prevalence. According to the World Health Organization, consequences of increased blood sugar led to an estimated 3.4 million deaths worldwide in 2004. Deaths due to diabetes according to WHO projections are likely to increase by two-thirds between 2008 and 2030.

Dr. Zirie and Dr. Mamtani were joined by diabetes experts, Dr. Amin Jayyousi, Dr. Mahmoud Zayoud and Ms. Maya Atani who focused on diabetes and pregnancy, type 2 diabetes in children and obesity in children respectively at the World Diabetes Day symposium.

\[\text{Dr. Mamtani addresses the World Diabetes Day symposium}\]

WCMC-Q was awarded $12.5 million in the fifth cycle of the National Priority Research Program (NPRP) from the Qatar National Research Fund (QNRF).

In all, 13 WCMC-Q research projects have benefited, which translates as a 37 percent success rate for the college – one of the highest for large, Qatar-based educational establishments.

The projects span the scientific range with a focus on biomedical issues important for Qatar and the region, including research into genomics, diabetes, pregnancy, epidemiology, cellular and molecular biology, neurodegenerative diseases, and mental health issues.

Dr. Khaled Machaca, associate dean for research at WCMC-Q, said the high rate of success for the college’s funding applications demonstrated the excellence of the proposed research and the dedication, success and high-level science performed by the faculty. He also said that this sustained level of funding from the QNRF is evidence of the central role that the fund is playing in establishing a research culture in the State of Qatar.

Dr. Machaca added: “The funded projects have clear benefits for Qatar and its people. As part of our commitment to Qatar Foundation, Cornell is committed to train doctors and help create and foster a culture of research in the country. These projects do that and the results are likely to have long-term advantages for Qatar.”

The funding provided by QNRF will be released over a period of three years.
Life just continues to get better for recent WCMC-Q graduate Dr. Jawad Al-Khafaji who has been selected for the prestigious American Society of Hematology’s (ASH) 2012 Trainee Research Award.

Years of hard work and dedication have paid off for this 2011 graduate who is currently a medical resident at the Virginia Commonwealth University School of Medicine in the United States.

“This has been such a great experience for me. I am fortunate to be awarded such an opportunity and I will use this experience to build on a career as a specialist in hematology/oncology. It is an opportunity of a lifetime that will hopefully be the foundation of a successful research and medical career for me,” Dr. Al-Khafaji said.

Dr. Al-Khafaji is one of 44 trainees selected by the ASH who will each receive $4,000 to conduct research on blood and blood-related diseases. The award is designed to foster interest and to expose them to both hematology and research early in their careers and to inspire them to pursue research in hematology as part of their future training.

Dr. Al-Khafaji arrived at WCMC-Q from Iraq on a scholarship offered by Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser, the chairperson of Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development.

His award will allow him to build upon the research experience he gained at WCMC-Q. During his time at the college he was involved in a research collaboration between WCMC-Q’s Department of Genetic Medicine and WCMC’s Laboratory of Neurogenetics and Development. The project, Folic Acid Supplementation Affects Epigenetic Changes Associated with the Wnt Pathway: Implications for Neural Tube Defects, resulted in an abstract presented at the 40th annual meeting of the Society for Neuroscience 2010 in San Diego, California.

In addition to receiving research funds, each ASH awardee will receive $1,000 to travel to the 54th ASH annual meeting at the Georgia World Congress Center in Atlanta in December. Attendance at this event, the premier annual educational and scientific meeting in the field of hematology, provides Trainee Research Award recipients with many opportunities to network with leaders in the field and to learn about the latest research and therapies in hematology.

The Trainee Research Awards have supported hundreds of students and medical residents in the United States, Mexico and Canada since 1995. The funding is distributed through the awardees’ institutions and supports the trainees’ research projects for a duration of three to 12 months.

ASH president Armand Keating, M.D. of Princess Margaret Hospital in Toronto congratulated the winners. “We anticipate hearing more about the discoveries made by this talented group in the years to come,” Dr. Keating said.

The American Society of Hematology, based in Washington, D.C., is the world’s largest professional society concerned with the causes and treatment of blood disorders. Its mission is to further the understanding, diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of disorders affecting blood, bone marrow, and the immunologic, hematologic, and vascular systems by promoting research, clinical care, education, training, and advocacy in hematology.

If any students in the Class of 2016 still had some lingering doubts about the challenges facing them over the next four years, WCMC-Q’s dean, Dr. Javaid Sheikh, highlighted the bumpy road ahead at the traditional White Coat Ceremony held as the first semester got underway.

Hosted at the Hamad Bin Khalifa Student Center, family, friends and faculty members watched as 39 first-year medical students were presented with a stethoscope and the short version of the traditional doctor’s white coat as a symbol of introduction to the medical fraternity. This is a ritual that has been adopted at medical schools in the United States and around the world to mark the transition from pre-med to medical studies and seen by students as a rite of passage.

Dr. Sheikh welcomed the students and wished them success with their studies. “You are joining the most noble of professions,” he said. “There will be hard work ahead but you will benefit from the world class facilities of Weill Cornell Medical College in Qatar and the experience of our faculty who will help you along the way.”

The new chief executive officer of Sidra Medical and Research Center, Dr. William Owen, delivered an inspiring keynote address and challenged the students to take up the opportunities available to them. The Class of 2016 will be an integral part of Sidra in the years ahead, Dr. Owen said.

WCMC-Q associate dean for admissions and student affairs, Dr. Ravinder Mamtani, welcomed Dr. Abdulatif Al-Khal, director of the...
The Supreme Education Council (SEC) has joined forces with WCMC-Q in its ambitious Sahtak Awalan: Your Health First campaign.

The college’s five-year campaign to improve the health of everyone in the country is being run in association with the Supreme Council of Health (SCH) and has major strategic partners in Qatar Petroleum, Occidental Petroleum of Qatar, Exxon Mobil and Vodafone Qatar.

The inclusion of the SEC means that the Your Health First campaign will now have huge support in Qatar’s educational sector, providing a massive boost to its mission of improving the health of the nation.

His Excellency Saad Bin Ibrahim Al Mahmoud, minister of education and higher education and secretary general of the Supreme Education Council, explained the role SEC will play in supporting the Your Health First campaign.

“With the start of the new school year, we thought the Supreme Education Council should enter into a strategic partnership with the Your Health First campaign, especially because it focuses in its first stage on children and youth,” H.E. Al Mahmoud said. “We are here to announce our full support to the organizers and partners of this initiative that promises to make schoolchildren and youth opt for healthy lifestyles,”

Dr. Javaid Sheikh, dean of WCMC-Q, added: “We are thrilled to have the Supreme Education Council as a strategic partner to the Your Health First initiative as this will help us spread awareness about healthy lifestyles among the different age groups of students, both Qataris and expatriates.

“We believe that the roles of the Supreme Education Council and the Supreme Council of Health complement each other, as both are working hard to build a healthy and well-educated generation that realizes the vision of His Highness the Emir, Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al Thani. Equally important, the complementary roles of SEC and SCH contribute to realizing the wise vision of His Highness Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al Thani, and Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser, who are leading Qatar’s journey into a thriving, knowledge-based economy.”

The participation of the SEC will allow the campaign greater access to schools so that young people can be encouraged to take up healthy lifestyles sooner rather than later.

Dr. Javaid Sheikh, dean of WCMC-Q, added: “We are thrilled to have the Supreme Education Council as a strategic partner to the Your Health First initiative as this will help us spread awareness about healthy lifestyles among the different age groups of students, both Qataris and expatriates. We are confident that through this partnership we will be able to help them achieve their goals and aspirations for a brighter future.”

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The participation of the SEC will allow the campaign greater access to schools so that young people can be encouraged to take up healthy lifestyles sooner rather than later. It will also help when the college is spreading news about events that young people can be involved in.

One of the first of these will be the Sahtak Awalan Fit for Life Challenge. It is expected about 24 schools will compete in a day-long contest which will see students from different schools pitted against each other in a variety of physical challenges.

Sahtak Awalan: Your Health First was launched in June at a high-profile event attended by His Excellency Abdullah bin Khalid Al Qahtani, minister of public health and secretary general of the Supreme Council of Health, and the campaign’s strategic partners. The public launch was held in Souq Waqif in August when people were able to ask for advice about living healthy lifestyles. They also had the chance to quiz Al Sadd Football Club player Omar Yahya Rabab about how he stays fit.

WCMC-Q also produced 30 television episodes and radio tips that were aired during the holy month of Ramadan in addition to marketing materials as part of the launch.

By Richard Harris
The accomplishments of Weill Cornell Medical College in Qatar over the past 10 years were celebrated in October with a dazzling ceremony attended by Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser, chairperson of Qatar Foundation.

The 10th anniversary event brought 800 guests to a stage erected on the lawn behind the university where they were entertained by musical performances and a 3-D film commissioned for the occasion, as well as hearing speeches from Dr. Javaid I. Sheikh, Dr. Mohammad Fathy Saoud, president of Qatar Foundation, and Mr. Sanford I. Weill, chairman of the Board of Overseers of WCMC.

A ‘garden of achievements’ equipped with audiovisual information pods was also installed, allowing guests to learn about WCMC-Q’s successes since beginning academic operations in 2002, which include graduating 112 new doctors, establishing a world-class biomedical program and entering partnerships with Hamad Medical Corporation, Sidra Medical and Research Center and Aspetar, Qatar’s first orthopedic and sports medicine hospital. The university was also the first to offer a United States M.D. degree overseas, and remains the only institution to do so, applying the same strict admissions standards and quality curriculum as its parent campus in New York.

The celebratory event, held on October 14, began with a reading from the Holy Qur’an by medical student Mohammed Al-Hajri, before drummers took to the darkened stage to lend a sense of drama to the occasion.

Her Highness congratulated the university on reaching its 10th anniversary. She said: “A decade ago, we welcomed Weill Cornell to Qatar, to be part of our vision for an innovative, healthy future for the people of Qatar and the region. Today the college is successfully delivering on its commitment to produce world-class doctors and to become a centre of excellence in education, research and clinical training.”

Established as a beacon of excellence for medical education in the Middle East, the university started life as a few borrowed classrooms at Qatar Academy high school before moving in October 2003 to the state-of-the-art building it now occupies. With its modern, well-equipped laboratories, cutting edge digital library system, sophisticated clinical skills center and rigorous academic standards, WCMC-Q proved extremely popular with both students and faculty alike. From a starting count of ten professors and 101 applications to the inaugural pre-medical program in 2002, there are now 60 academic faculty members and there were 480 applications to the pre-medical program in 2012.
The university has also established a thriving biomedical research program that has 28 active laboratories and more than 130 members of staff, making a significant contribution towards Qatar’s goal of moving to a knowledge-based economy. Research efforts have a particular focus on increasing understanding of conditions that commonly afflict local populations in Qatar, such as diabetes, obesity and heart disease.

The audience enjoyed donning 3-D glasses to watch a film detailing the facilities and achievements of WCMC-Q, before the stage curtain was suddenly whipped back to reveal Qatari singer Fahad Al Kubaisi and the children’s choir of Qatar International School who gave a surprise performance of a song composed for the event.

Dr. Sheikh highlighted the progress made by the college since 2002. He said: “The establishment of Weill Cornell Medical College in Qatar was always going to be a challenge, but everyone involved in this great adventure has risen to that challenge and surpassed all expectations. “The progress that has been made in the last 10 years is quite astounding. A decade ago we did not even have a building to call our own and now we are here having graduated 112 doctors and with a fully-fledged research program. “For these, and so many other achievements, I must thank all of our faculty, staff members and students. The dedication, hard work and vision they have shown over the last decade leaves one feeling truly humble. “Of course, there are two people without whom none of this would have happened, His Highness the Emir Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al Thani, and Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser, chairperson of Qatar Foundation.

“Without their vision and drive we would not be celebrating this anniversary now and I hope that what we have created in Weill Cornell Medical College in Qatar lives up to their every expectation. “The goal for Qatar to become a knowledge-based economy rather than being based on hydrocarbons was always ambitious. However, I believe the country’s leaders have been justified in that ambition and that Weill Cornell is helping to lead the way towards a new future.”

Visiting from New York for the occasion, Sanford I. Weill, chairman of the Board of Overseers of WCMC, addressed the audience to express his pride in the success of WCMC-Q’s achievements over the past decade.

“My wife, Joan, joins me in expressing our heartfelt congratulations on the 10-year anniversary of Weill Cornell Medical College in Qatar,” he said. “Achieving this milestone has been a labor of love and we are very grateful for our strong partnership with His Highness the Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser and the Qatar Foundation. Together, we have built something special that will continue to attract the best and brightest from all over the region, as well as the world. We take immense pride that our students in Qatar are doing equally as well as our students in New York as it relates to their test scores and where they are chosen for their residencies. The fact that we are still the only American medical school to offer an M.D. degree outside the U.S. speaks volumes of the hard work, dedication and determination of the entire Weill Cornell team.”

By John Hayward
Images of a glittering evening

H.E. Dr. Ghalia Al-Thani, of the WCMC-Q Joint Advisory Board with Dr. William Owen, CEO of Sidra Medical and Research Center

Humna Asad, Meghan Pais, Jhoanna Tan, Saira Khan and Faten Shunnar

The information pods proved popular Dr. Rachid Bendriss, Dr. Ziyad Mahfoud, Dr. Stephen Scott and Yasmeen Salameh

Violinists entertained the crowd following the ceremony Mariam Gabrial, Min Choi and Mouhamwed Abou-Ismail

Mr. Faisal M. Alsuwaidi, president of Research and Development at QF reads WCMC-Q’s commemorative book

WCMC-Q Student Ibrahim Al-Emadi and Ameen Al-Aghil watch a film on the information pod

Dr. Antonio M. Gotto Jr., dean emeritus of WCMC chats to H.E. Dr. Abdulla Al-Thani, president of Hamad Bin Khalifa University

Dr. Leopold Streletz, Dr. Basim Uthman, Dr. Mark Pecker, Dr. Benjamin Shykind, Dr. Lyuba Konopasek, Dr. Shahinaz Bedri
T he department at Weil Cornell Medical College in Qatar has launched a bold initiative that will involve the entire student body from the foundation program through to the medical program in a series of literary lectures that aims to cultivate a love of literature, writing, and language.

Plans are also underway to host an emerging and talented young poet or two from the United States for a week-long series of student workshops, readings, transnational forums, and lectures, all of which will be open to Education City and the wider community.

“The Literary Lecture Series is about fostering an appreciation of English literature, but it is also about appreciating the connective tissues between art and science, culture and society, the individual and history: a binding essence beyond the strictly corporal, English, Arabic, or otherwise,” said Professor Ian Miller, lecturer of English writing.

“We want to involve the entire student body at WCMC-Q. We see the college as a continuous whole, wherein the humanities play a fundamental role in the development of our students as empathic and compassionate future physicians.”

“I believe we understand our lives and the condition of our living through story. We create narratives to etch meaning from the rawness of experience. By interacting with the narratives of others via texts - poetry, prose, the visual arts, music, film - we enhance our abilities to recognize the common human story shared by all.”

The Literary Lecture Series provides an official forum for WCMC-Q’s writing faculty to share their research and love of literature with the community. Every fall, the incoming pre-medical and foundation class participates in Cornell’s First Year Reading Project. This year, the students all read Lewis Carroll’s classic, Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland - a beautifully illustrated tale of a young girl’s search for identity in a morass of inversions and oddities.

The Literary Lecture Series is an extension of our efforts to advance the nascent culture of literacy at WCMC-Q and beyond, Prof. Miller said.

“Alice’s Adventures is part of this year’s reading project for incoming students — a shared experience that helps bond the class together. As for individual first-year writing seminars, the texts vary by course. Each seminar presents its own autonomous subject under the general mandate of the Knight Writing Institute on the main campus. Students generally read anywhere between 40 and 70 pages of text a week and write six revised essays over the course of the semester. There is already a lively interest in English literature and students often search out opportunities to incorporate the humanities into their education. The WCMC-Q debate club, Circa’t, and the student-run literary journal Between Seminar Rooms are some of the avenues where students demonstrate an interest in rhetorical, literary, and artistic pursuits.

So why, you may inquire, would medical students need to focus on English literature instead of more traditional aspects of grammar and report writing that may help future doctors? Prof. Miller turns to the words of poet and editor Christian Wiman to answer this one: “Let us remember ... in the end we go to poetry for one reason, so that we might more fully inhabit our lives and the world in which we live them, and if we more fully inhabit these things, we might be less apt to destroy both.”

“I think it’s safe to say that any medical student, physician, or scientist, can find useful political, social, and cultural relevance, commonality, and resonance in such a proposition. Moreover, the concepts of narrative medicine and clinical humanities have taken a hold in medical pedagogy. ‘Every patient arrives to the hospital with a story, not just a symptom or disease but a cultural and social narrative that informs the doctor-patient dyad. Physicians are being trained to treat their case studies as stories to synthesize with treatment. By becoming more aware of this synthesis, doctors can better care for their patients holistically.”

By Hilton Kolbe
Newly enrolled foundation and pre-medical students were officially welcomed to WCMC-Q on August 28 in a ceremony led by the university’s dean, Dr. Javaid I. Sheikh.

Parents were also in attendance at the Opening Exercises event, where they watched faculty members present 19 foundation and 48 pre-medical students with ceremonial pins in recognition of their new status as members of the WCMC-Q family.

Addressing the assembled guests in WCMC-Q’s Lecture Hall 3, which was filled to capacity, Dr. Sheikh spoke of the mission of the university, its achievements to date and its ambitions for the future.

He said: “I extend a very warm welcome to all of you on behalf of our faculty, staff and administration. This really is a very, very special occasion.

“Our goals here are nothing less than to establish WCMC-Q as the premier medical education institution in the MENA (Middle East and North African) region and we are already making good progress. Our vision is that by 2015 we will be a major player in preparing a skilled workforce to improve healthcare for Qatar’s population, not only by producing physicians, but also researchers in our laboratories.”

Dr. Sheikh told the students that research at the university was intended to benefit the local community.

“We believe that the research should be targeting those ailments which afflict the population here,” he said.

“Our focus is on translating findings from the laboratory to clinical trials that lead to new treatments for cancer, diabetes and cardiovascular disease. Research must go all the way from the lab bench to the bedside.”

By participating in this mission, Dr. Sheikh explained, students had the opportunity to help WCMC-Q work towards Qatar National Vision 2030, adding: “Through WCMC-Q, you can help to demonstrate that Qatar can become the first country in this region to really transform itself from a carbon-based economy to a knowledge economy.”

Students, their families and faculty members then had the chance to speak with each other at a reception held in the North Commons.

First-year pre-medical student Fahad Al-Marri, a graduate of the WCMC-Q foundation course, explained why he had chosen to study at the university.

“First of all, there is a deficit of doctors here in Qatar,” he said.

“But the reason I wanted to study here is that the university doesn’t just aim to fill the gap in the number of doctors, but has the ambition to produce really excellent physicians and researchers who can help to develop and deliver new treatments that ultimately save lives. That is what I want to be a part of.”

Zahra Hejji, also a first-year pre-medical student, said: “I feel really excited and, of course, a little bit afraid because it’s a big transition from high school.

“But I am looking forward to expanding my knowledge because I would like to work in research, particularly relating to diseases like obesity and diabetes as they affect the people here in my home country, as well as being growing problems around the world.”

The Opening Exercises evening was just one of a series of events organized as part of the foundation and pre-medical orientation program running from August 27 to 30. Students got to know their new classmates with icebreaker activity sessions on each of the four days of the program, and on day one took part in a cultural night where they wore national dress.

“Students and workers get ready to share a cake

“Students and workers get ready to share a cake

“Students and workers get ready to share a cake

By John Hayward

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There was also the annual event where new students serve dinner to the college’s cleaning staff and other workers, as well as information sessions on how to get involved in student activities and about the various facilities on offer at WCMC-Q such as the Distributed e-Library and the Writing Skills Center.

The program ended on day four with a community service evening in which donated goods were collected to give to Qatar Charity.

By John Hayward
WCMC-Q researchers excel at QF Annual Research Forum

Institute of Health, and Hamad Medical Corporation in Qatar, for how the science at this year’s forum has improved tremendously and the workshops were targeting areas that directly address the Qatar National Research Strategy. Human capital is what drives research, and we must continue to find ways to invest in those who can help carry out the strategy’s implementation,” Mr. Alswaid said.

Dr. Dirar Khoury, director of institutional research and acting executive director of Qatar Foundation’s research division, said the quality of the research at the 10th Annual Research Forum has improved and the workshops continue to improve with each passing year. “It is a true honor to award these talented scientists grants, as they will not only advance their own ambitions, but the agenda of Qatar’s National Research Strategy. Human capital is what drives research, and we must continue to find ways to invest in those who can help carry out the strategy’s implementation,” Mr. Alswaid said.

The president of research and development at Qatar Foundation, Faisal Alswaid, said a key goal of this year’s forum was to inspire collaboration for future research and winning abstracts were picked based on quality, merit, and relevance to the nation.

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Researcher sets the pace with mountain running

The four races all differ in grade, intensity and distance but have one thing in common: they are equally tough, difficult to master and require a superior level of strength, fitness and determination to finish.

“This has become something of a family event for us,” Dr. Rafi said. “We enjoy going there as a family. The kids love the place for the vacation and I enjoy running in the region.”

“I started out by running by myself and built up to running in these types of races. The whole concept has changed a lot and trail running has become very popular. When I first started out there were less than a thousand runners in the four different races - now it has increased to over six thousand runners in just four years.”

Over the past few years, Dr. Rafi has competed and finished every event in the series. It is regarded as the premier race meeting in international long distance trail running. This season he took on the challenging 119km TDS Sur Les Traces des Ducs de Savoie race that starts at Courmayeur, in northern Italy, in the foothills of Mont Blanc.

The TDS race goes around Mont Blanc, the highest mountain in Western Europe. There is a cutoff time of 31 hours and 30 minutes for the 1,400 competitors who reach a height of more than 2,000 meters during the race.

Organizers describe the TDS race as the wild alternative. It is a mountainous event that includes several sections at altitude above 2,500m, in weather conditions that can be very difficult with bitterly cold nights, strong winds, rain or snow. The route takes a narrow passage up to the Col de Gîte de 2,322m where runners are greeted by an amazing panoramic view of the mountain chains of Mont Blanc and surrounding peaks before crossing the nose of the Bionnassay glacier by footbridge towards the finish at Chamonix.

“It sounds a whole lot harder than it really is,” Dr. Rafi says of his achievements. “It’s not as demanding as triathlons or the marathon because it is more about building on resistance. So, it is not what I do in this year that affects my race but it is what I have done in the last five years.

“So every year I am going through, it becomes easier for me as I build up resistance. But I have to run at least five to seven hours per week to stay in condition. At this rate you don’t really increase your level. You need to do a lot more running to increase your level of achievement.”

Dr. Rafi nears the finishing line

“The whole concept of these races is – you start it and you go through a range of emotions. Everyone goes through it and you think ‘am I going to finish it or will I have the strength to finish it’? You have to dig very deep inside yourself to find a good reason to finish it. So you build on the positive images of your life and that keeps you going beyond your limit. It’s a very different psychology. You build more on your mental strength, rather than your physical strength.”

Dr Rafii said the race time is not so important, it is more the challenge of finishing. He explained that this year’s run was interesting because the race was not long but it rained for 30 hours.

“It rained almost the whole race and it was very cold. You need to know how to recognize and how to manage the stress of hypothermia.” he added. “At one of the pit stops, 500 people stopped because of hypothermia. They just went through a very difficult task at night and they could not go fast enough to keep their temperature up. It is really a challenging race. It is all about how you manage your equipment, how you manage yourself, how you manage your temperature. I was happy to manage that.”

By Hilton Kolbe
Exploring stem cell therapies for Parkinson’s sufferers

The potential of stem cell therapies to alleviate Parkinson’s disease was discussed in a lecture delivered by Dr. Claire Henchcliffe, visiting associate professor from the department of neurology and neuroscience at Weill Cornell Medical College in New York.

Dr. Henchcliffe, who is the Daisy & Paul Soros Scholar in Clinical Neurology and director of the Parkinson’s Disease & Movement Disorder Institute in New York, gave faculty members and students at WCM-Q a brief history of stem cell treatments for the debilitating disease, which causes involuntary tremors and movements (dyskinesia), and difficulty walking and slowness of movement (bradykinesia), among other symptoms.

Students and faculty members in attendance at the lecture on 7 October, entitled Is There Hope for Stem Cell Therapy in Parkinson’s Disease?, heard that the need to develop effective treatments for the condition is becoming more pressing.

“Parkinson’s is the second most common neurodegenerative disorder after Alzheimer’s and probably affects about four million people worldwide,” said Dr. Henchcliffe. “The World Health Organization has said that it’s going to become much more prominent and is probably going to double within the next couple of decades because of aging populations.”

The anatomical pathology of the disease, explained Dr. Henchcliffe, is characterized by the death of dopamine-producing cells in the substantia nigra, a part of the brain that plays a key role in coordinating movement. Since dopamine is an important neurotransmitter, a lack of the chemical inhibits the ability of nerve cells to send signals to one another, impairing movement. Stem cell therapies therefore focus on replacing the dead dopamine-producing cells by grafting stem cells into strategic areas of the brain.

Dr. Henchcliffe, who was in Doha for a week to teach second-year medical students part of their brain and mind course, said: “The challenges we face are better diagnosis of Parkinson’s, individualizing treatments more effectively and finding ways to slow down the disease. But what we would really love to be able to do is actually to reverse the disease. The difficulty is that implanted cells may not survive or may be rejected.”

Dr. Henchcliffe and her team undertook an exhaustive review of previous studies, aiming to understand the difficulties encountered by researchers.

Major clinical trials conducted in the U.S. and Sweden had shown good results in some implant recipients, but outcomes had been unpredictable.

She said: “Some people did extremely well but others showed no improvement or only modest improvement. What worried everyone was that once the cells are implanted, they cannot be removed, and some recipients developed very severe graft-induced dyskinesia.”

However, Dr. Henchcliffe was optimistic that recent developments in stem cell technology offer hope for researchers and sufferers, possibly paving the way for a new clinical trial. This centers on scientists at Rockefeller University who derived the first human embryonic stem cell lines to be made available to other research institutes, releasing them in 2009. These stem cells represent a breakthrough because they are more controllable than previous lines, allowing researchers to differentiate them into specific types of cells for treatment of various conditions.

Dr. Henchcliffe said: “Right now we think the best thing we’ve got are these human embryonic stem cell lines that are very well understood in the laboratory. We think that we have got understanding to at least go ahead and start consulting and discussing what a first human transplant trial using human embryonic stem cells from the lab would look like.”

Dr. Henchcliffe also gave the first address of the Medicine And U Public Lecture Series 2012-2013, entitled What Can Neurological Movement Disorders Teach Us About Aging? on 9 October.

First-year med students tour diabetes clinic facility

Students entering their first year of medical training visited Qatar Diabetes Association (QDA) to see treatment plans for the chronic metabolic disease in action.

The QCMC-G students toured the facilities at QDA on September 9, met clinicians and interacted with patients visiting the clinic as part of their ongoing care plans.

Diabetes is perhaps the most pressing health issue affecting Qatar, with an estimated 17 percent of the native population and 12 percent of the total population known to have the disease. The majority of sufferers have type 2 diabetes, which is acquired in adulthood and is linked with obesity.

Students sat in on consultations between patients and QDA clinicians to discover how the condition can be managed by following a healthy diet, regularly checking blood sugar levels and taking regular exercise.

Senior QDA dietician Katie El Nahas gave a presentation outlining the general principles of diabetes management.

She said: “Medication is only about five percent of treatment for diabetes. The rest is about managing the condition through diet, lifestyle, exercise and education.”

“Meaning that we spend a lot of time and effort working with patients to give them not only the information they need to manage their diabetes, but also the tools and self-esteem they need to implement that information.”

El Nahas explained that patients could live relatively normal lives if they managed their condition carefully, but that failing to do so could lead to severe complications such as blindness, cardiovascular disease, increased risk of stroke, kidney malfunction and poor circulation that can result in amputation of extremities.

Students watched a QDA clinician show the parents of a seven-year-old boy with type 1 diabetes how to take a blood sample, check the blood sugar level and administer an insulin shot. QDA dieticians then held a question and answer session for the students.

Dr. Sharoud Matthis, QDA program manager, outlined the challenge diabetes poses to Qatar. She said: “The major part of health expenditure in Qatar is spent on diabetes care and treating the associated complications, so if we can help to prevent people acquiring diabetes or catch it early, and help them to manage their condition, there will be very significant financial savings for the country.

“Even more importantly, we will be able to save a lot of people from suffering and contribute positively to the general health and wellbeing of Qatar.”

Dr. Matthis said that WCMC-G students could play a key role in helping Qatar meet the challenge of delivering diabetes care if they chose to specialize in the condition, a prospect Qatari student Ameen Amiri found inspiring.

“I’m definitely considering specializing in diabetes healthcare, simply because of the number of people in Qatar who suffer from it,” she said.

“I think it’s very important that doctors learn to communicate in the proper way to encourage people to get help earlier.”

Dr. Saleha Abbasi, Saleha Abbasi, Maryem Al Manaa and Zahra Rahman
Food. That's going to be different from what a frog needs or what a mouse needs if it's living in a New York City subway, for example. Eventually we hope to find desert-specific odor receptor genes that allow an animal to survive in a harsh environment with very little water and very little food.

To do so, the research team works in the laboratory to isolate the genetic material of the animals using a chemical process in which all extraneous material is dissolved away from the tissue samples. The genetic material – DNA and RNA – is then passed to WCMC-Q's genomics core where state-of-the-art equipment and techniques are used to assemble it into a readable sequence. The sequenced genetic material is then handed to the bioinformatics core where computers analyze the sequences and determine which are likely to be related to olfaction by comparing them to known genes.

Despite the advanced equipment, the computers cannot definitively identify a gene. To do that, Dr. Shykind and his team must return to the lab. He explained: "We use the computer to sift through all of these billions of DNA sequence elements and then categorize them into known genes or likely genes. It's a little bit like you're looking at the ground from 5,000ft in the air and you can identify something as a car or a house by their rough shapes and similarity to other examples of cars or houses. That's what the computer does for us, but with the gene sequences, so it narrows down the search hugely. When we receive the material again after it has been sequenced and analyzed, we then go back into the laboratory and try to prove that the object we thought was a house actually is a house."

According to Dr. Shykind, the research has the potential to shed light on more than the olfactory systems of two particular animals by increasing understanding of the processes by which cells select and express the relevant parts of the genetic code to become any one of the huge number of different types of cells that exist in animals. Rather than focusing only on decoding the genetic material, which is a well-advanced field of research, he is interested in elucidating the as-yet mysterious and inscrutable processes by which cells regulate their genes in order to generate complexity and specialized functions - a field of research that is very much in its infancy.
He said: “I’m interested overall in how animals use their genes to generate complexity. One of the big mysteries and compelling reasons to study biology is that we all start as a single cell and that single cell has a genetic library and – remarkably – we go from that single cell to billions of cells.

“The analogy of a library is a useful one, because different types of cells are checking out different books. So a nerve cell in the eye is going to check out different types of genes than a muscle cell.

Dr. Shykind envisaged that his basic research could lead to a number of applications in future. He said: “Let’s say that in the camel nose we find receptors that we could harness and make artificial sensing devices to find water – that would be spectacular.”

The research will also contribute to the growing body of knowledge of gene regulation, one of the most exciting research areas in molecular biology. This in turn has implications for understanding how genes are affected by environmental factors and the role they play in causing disease.

Dr. Shykind continued: “Getting back to the bigger question of how genes are turned on or turned off, many cancers, for example, are sporadic in nature. One individual might develop a cancer whereas their identical twin will not, so it’s not based on their genes – it’s based on the things that happen to the regulation of the genes. And that might be at the heart of certain malignancies that lead to diseases like cancer and potentially diabetes and other conditions. It’s very interesting because we typically think of environmental toxins as being toxic in a direct way, but they could in fact be toxic because they alter patterns of genes being turned on and turned off almost in a heritable way, so environment is likely to play a larger role than we understand in a lot of these processes.”

Dr. Shykind’s team has recently received a large amount of DNA sequence from the genomics core and has begun the painstaking process of working through the material.

He added: “We’re happy that there are certainly plenty of genes there, which we expected. We’re now starting to categorize them and to reach the level of proving them (to be odor receptor genes). It’s early days and it’s a long process but we’re now at the point of assigning identities to these genes so hopefully in the near future we will be able to confirm some of them.”

By John Hayward

Bridging the linguistic gap

Qatar is a patchwork of nationalities with hundreds of different languages spoken by its residents. But that can pose challenges for doctors at Hamad Medical Corporation when they are faced with treating a patient who is unable to understand or communicate with them.

With this in mind, WCMC-Q’s Center for Cultural Competency in Health Care (CCCHC) held the first ‘Bridging the Gap’ medical interpretation training course for bilingual volunteers who wanted to help both patients and the medical profession alike.

Huda Abbedrahim, medical interpreters’ trainer at the CCCHC, added: “It takes a long journey to build community capacity of qualified medical interpreters. The process includes selecting the right candidates, providing them with quality training to enhance their skills and ensuring their continuous professional development. Our main goal is to help facilitate cross-cultural communication in healthcare settings, which is very common in Qatar, and prepare highly qualified medical interpreters who are ready to make a difference in healthcare settings.”

Qatari national Noora Essa Al-Fadala, who speaks Arabic and English, was one of those taking part in the program. She said it was a vital service, particularly for elderly Qatari who may have greater difficulty in understanding a non-Qatari doctor.

She said: “It’s mainly about helping people in medical situations. That is our main role. The program gives us a strategy about how we can be a good interpreter. I have to interpret everything but not necessarily all the time. When I feel there is a misunderstanding between the doctor and patient I have to speak out and clarify the issue.”

Volunteers spent five days learning techniques and studying medical terminology before their details were passed onto hospitals who could then call on them if and when they were needed.

Filipina national Maria Ventura, a process coordinator at Sidra Medical and Research Center, said she now understood that often patients felt quite helpless in medical situations, particularly when they did not fully understand what is being said to them.

She said: “I have also come to realize the beauty of common communication and understanding between two people. In health care appropriate medication can be applied if there is communication.”
WCMC-Q leading the Middle East with its Center for Cultural Competence in Health Care programs

The Center for Cultural Competence in Health Care (CCCHC) at Weill Cornell Medical College in Qatar (WCMC-Q) has been featured in one of the world’s most prestigious medical journals.

The June issue of Academic Medicine published a lengthy article about the center, detailing its development, its aims and its successes.

The piece was co-authored by Maha Elnashar, director of CCCHC; Huda Abdelrahim, trainer and medical interpreter at CCCHC; and Dr. Michael D. Fettters of the University of Michigan who is collaborating with WCMC-Q on research.

Ms. Elnashar said: “Academic Medicine is one of the leading peer-reviewed journals in the world. To publicize the story of our center in such a prestigious journal emphasizes the global interest and importance of cultural competence in our new world order. It is also a great recognition of our dedicated endeavors and WCMC-Q’s vision to promote global health.”

“Sharing the details of our work will hopefully inform other institutions and hospitals in the region who are considering introducing similar initiatives, further enhancing health-care.”

The center, of which WCMC-Q’s is the only one of its kind in the Middle East, educates students, faculty and health care providers about the cultural differences of nationalities, which may in turn affect how they treat patients. Instances could be as simple as an Arab woman refusing to be treated by a male doctor but may be as specific as medics recognizing when a bruised child has undergone coin-rubbing; not a form of abuse but a traditional culture and to be aware of their own biases affecting how they treat patients. Instances could be as simple as an Arab woman refusing to be treated by a male doctor but may be as specific as medics recognizing when a bruised child has undergone coin-rubbing; not a form of abuse but a traditional therapy that involves messaging the patient with hot oil and the edge of a coin.

Ms. Abdelrahim said: “WCMC-Q’s department for global and public health, was launched in 2009 with a view to preparing them for life at university, explain what is expected of them and also offer help with their SAEs. The students were from schools across the country, although two students travelled a little further; one came from Bahrain while the other flew in thousands of miles from Ireland.

In all 40 potential pre-medical students – about a third of whom were Qatari – took part in the summer Medical Explorer Program.

In previous years the program has taken students for just one week but for the first time this year the program lasted three weeks, providing potential undergraduates with more information about what a career in medicine entails. They also had the chance to meet faculty members and attend lectures from some of WCMC-Q’s professors as well as have hands-on experience in the laboratories.

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Noha Saleh, director of student recruitment at WCMC-Q, said: “The whole idea of the Medical Explorer Program is to show potential students what a medical degree at WCMC-Q will involve and demystify the process for them.

“We want them to apply to the college knowing exactly what we require of them but also the support, facilities and world-class faculty that we will provide in return.

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Mohammed Al Abd, who attends Omar Bin Al Khattab School, said the program was very useful in knowing what to expect if a successful application is made to WCMC-Q.

The 17-year-old said: “It’s good to be here as I know Weill Cornell is going to give us knowledge about studying medicine and I also just wanted to know about the place as after high school I will maybe apply here.

“If successful I might be here for six years so it’s good to find out about the university and the facilities.”

Focus on the next generation of doctors

High school students were treated to a ‘taste of what life is like at WCMC-Q when they took part in the summer Medical Explorer Program.

In all 40 potential pre-medical students – about a third of whom were Qatari – took part in the scheme, which was designed to prepare them for life at university, explain what is expected of them and also offer help with their SAEs. The students were from schools across the country, although two students travelled a little further; one came from Bahrain while the other flew in thousands of miles from Ireland.

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A new approach to healthcare

The newly appointed chief executive officer of Sidra Medical and Research Center has spoken of the strong relationship between his organization and WCMC-Q, which he believes can help usher in a new era of improved access to quality healthcare for people all over the world.

Dr. William Owen, who assumed the role of CEO at Sidra Medical and Research Center has been standing has not been reduced. The vision of Her Highness Sheikha Moza, endorsed by the board of Sidra and supported by Qatar Foundation, was first of all a public acknowledgement of there was a disparity in health and healthcare that can be addressed and that one of the ways this can be done is with a specialty healthcare facility like Sidra.

Describing Sidra’s unique working structure, Dr. Owen was keen to stress the importance of physicians working in close cooperation with other professionals in the field to improve the overall health of patients.

He said: “While Sidra is a structural facility where healthcare is a goal, health is equally important as a goal, which means that the way physicians, nurses and other health-related providers engage with the patients will be different. Care will be provided by teams of healthcare professionals; so rather than traditional ways of providing healthcare, which is best described by a hierarchical or caste system where the physician is at the pinnacle, it will be provided by teams where different disciplines, opinions and perspectives of healthcare are actually respected and embraced and part of the care plan.”

Under this model, physicians will be encouraged to view the hospitalization of a patient as only a single component of a wider care plan that extends beyond the hospital, drawing in the patient’s family and complementary external healthcare providers.

In order for medicine to be practiced in this way, medical training will be tailored to produce what Dr. Owen calls, “a new type of physician.”

He said: “Sidra will be a learning environment whereby we will quite deliberately try to groom - I anticipate successfully - a different type of physician, one who is humanistic and who will address what I would characterize as some of the ills in healthcare that my generation has not managed very well.

“One of those ills is what I would describe as inverse healthcare delivery, not just in Qatar or the United States, but throughout the world. The people who have the least means have the greatest burden of disease and vice versa, and that is something that needs to be addressed.

“What I see is a exciting is that from the day they walk through the door, we are going to train those young men and young women to think about how to address those ills. They will be much more humanistic physicians.”

WCMC-Q students therefore form an integral part of Sidra’s mission to both increase the national capacity of Qatar in healthcare and carry forward the new approach to patient care. For that reason, Dr. Owen explained, the ties between Sidra and the university are crucial, and he has been encouraged by the strength and depth of the partnership he has witnessed so far.

“The relationship is already established and it goes well beyond the legal document of an affiliation agreement,” he said. “Most importantly, the relationship is established in terms of intellectual and emotional alignment and that comes down to the simple thing of interaction among people: do the leadership and the people deeper in the organization at Weill Cornell Qatar embrace the sort of attributes that I’ve described for Sidra and vice versa? The answer to that is a categorical ‘yes’. We welcome one another’s partnership - if you don’t have that sort of emotional alignment, no contract, no legal document is going to manage that.”

“Pencils have erasers for a reason, especially when you’re learning. You often need to use the eraser.”

But it is not only students and patients who will benefit from the strong relationship between WCMC-Q and Sidra, added Dr. Owen, as the new center also promises to boost the potential for collaborative research.

“Having a vibrant medical school and a state-of-the-art healthcare delivery system working closely together is a wonderful incubator for discovery,” he said. “You can monetize those intellectual assets by creating revenue streams or they can create jobs for people. By working together to make new discoveries, Sidra and WCMC-Q can help Qatar in its mission to develop a knowledge-based economy.”

By John Hayward

The second part of the training at Sidra that’s going to be different and very powerful is the use of simulations. When I trained – and I’m not that old - you were dependent on case material, so if you wanted to learn how to deliver a baby you had to hope a woman would come in delivering a baby. Now, with simulations that involve hi-tech dummies and interviews, you can replicate what is being done and you can do it without causing harm - it is a wonderful way to train people. You can simulate childbearing and you can simulate trauma in circumstances in which you can make a mistake and no one is harmed.

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By John Hayward
The challenges for a greener and more sustainable future

Ocean science and technology expert Professor Charles Greene was in Doha to attend the United Nations Climate Change Conference 2012 (COP18) and took time out to visit WCMC-Q to share his views on shaping a more sustainable world in the future.

Professor Greene is the director of the ocean resources and ecosystems program in the department of earth and atmospheric sciences at Cornell University. His talk was titled: A Need for Qatar Leadership in Securing a Sustainable World for Future Generations.

"Imagine a future in which Qatar plays a role in finding a solution to the challenges confronting humanity during the 21st century. Imagine an integrated solution to climate change, energy security, and food security emerging from the Arab world of the Middle East and Saharan North Africa. The realization of such a future and such a solution are a lot closer to reality than many people can imagine," said Professor Greene.

He also described a bold plan to transform modern society from its currently unsustainable fossil-fuel addiction to a new reliance on algal bioenergy and concentrated solar power. Along with this energy transformation, the plan also integrates a suite of technologies that will reduce carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere, provide new sources of food, freshwater, and employment to regions of the world where all of these things are in short supply.

In a wide-ranging discourse about the long-term impacts of global warming, climate change, the consequences of rising sea levels and the near universal dependence on declining resources of fossil fuels, Professor Greene outlined a grim future that could have a major impact on the way we live our lives and conduct our business.

"By demonstrating leadership in addressing humanity’s greatest challenges, Qatar can not only ensure its own national security, it can help stabilize an increasingly unstable world," Professor Greene said.

Small steps are already in place in Qatar with an experimental solar energy and algae cultivation plant established as part of the Sahara Forest Project at Mesaimeer.

On its website, the pilot program describes its mission designed to utilize what we have enough of to produce what we need more of, using deserts, saltwater and carbon dioxide to produce food, water and clean energy. This is done by combining already existing and proven environmental technologies, including saltwater-cooled greenhouses, concentrated solar power (CSP) and technologies for desert reforestation around a saltwater infrastructure.

Doctors of the Future winners sample the rigors of scientific research

Three talented Qatari high school students returned from an intense two-week medical and scientific scholarship in New York with renewed passion to pursue careers in medicine and research as part of the Healing Hands program.

Hessa Khalid Ali-Hall, Ali Mohsen Haji and Hamad Nasser Al Naimi were this year’s winners of Weill Cornell Medical College in Qatar’s annual Doctors of the Future Scholarship. They were rewarded with a fully funded, two-week trip to the lab of Dr. Ronald Crystal, chairman of the department of genetic medicine at Weill Cornell Medical College in New York. There they learnt about laboratory procedures and the scientific method from physician-researchers at WCMC and NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital.

Standing before the faculty of the department of genetic medicine at WCMC, the high school students outlined all they had accomplished over the previous two weeks: differentiating cell types, culturing cell lines, performing a DNA restriction digest and transfecting cells with a reporter gene – among a half-dozen other scientific and laboratory techniques.

Students are awarded the Doctors of the Future Scholarships based on an annual essay competition open to all high school students throughout Qatar. This year’s essay topic was on the history and future of medicine in the country. Separately, each of the students wrote about the changing face of health care in Qatar, from the practice of traditional herbal medicine through the introduction of modern technology in the last 25 years and, finally, to the future of medicine in the next 50 years as envisioned by Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser, chairperson of Qatar Foundation.

WCMC-Q’s director of student recruitment, Nooha Saleh, said it was a remarkable and an exciting experience for the winners. "Since the inception of the essay competition in 2008, WCMC-Q has awarded scholarships to 11 students. By doing so, we hope to stimulate the interest of the younger generation of Qatar to pursue medicine and research as a career by providing them with an opportunity to visit our research labs in New York. So far the program has been very successful as students come back and apply to our pre-medical program.”

During the course of their two-week visit, the students toured three labs and two patient care units, including NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital’s medical intensive care unit.

In the labs, the students worked with two main cell lines, A549 and 293HEK. One of the primary experiments was the introduction of a reporter gene into a cell line and then testing and identifying the expression of the newly introduced gene.

“We had embryonic kidney cells and we transfected these cells with a gene that codes for GFP (green fluorescent protein). And we added also a PEI (polyethylenimine), which helps DNA get into cells, and then we viewed the cells under a green laser," said Ali-Hall, who attends high school at the Al-Bayan Educational Complex for Girls in Doha.

For Hessa, this was her first trip to the U.S. and she was fascinated by the different lifestyle. “It was a remarkable experience. New York was so unbelievable and way better than what the movies show. I really enjoyed my time there. Yes, it was different to Qatar but it was also a very beneficial experience. I made the utmost of it,” Hessa said.
Curriculum a hit with visiting residency program directors

The chances of WCMC-Q graduates securing spots on residency programs at elite hospitals received a boost when program directors from leading U.S. institutions visited the university in October.

Residency program directors from Johns Hopkins University, Virginia Commonwealth University and Albany Medical College, among several others, attended the three-day New Frontiers in Medical Education symposium from October 2 to 4 where they met and spoke to WCMC-Q faculty, students and alumni, as well as touring the facilities at HMC.

Among the visitors was Dr. Javaid Sheikh, a keynote address was given by WCMC-Q alumnus Mohamed Elshahi, who gave an account of his experiences on a residency program at the renowned Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. Dr. Wallace Carter, director of the emergency medicine residency program, gave a further keynote address to discuss the ramifications of the Next Accreditation System currently being introduced by the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education.

Through a series of seminars, tours and roundtable discussions, the event introduced the program directors to WCMC-Q and its commitment to academic excellence, while simultaneously giving students the opportunity to learn key skills to maximize their chances of success in their residency applications.

Following a welcome message by college dean Dr. Javad Sheikh, a keynote address was given by WCMC-Q alumnus Mohamed Elshahi, who gave an account of his experiences on a residency program at the renowned Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. Dr. Wallace Carter, director of the emergency medicine residency program, gave a further keynote address to discuss the ramifications of the Next Accreditation System currently being introduced by the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education.

The second day brought roundtable discussions between students and program directors and an ‘Intern Bootcamp’ coaching session led by Dr. Norman Angel, chairman and program director of the obstetrics and gynecology residency program at Albany Medical College.

For third-year medical student Abdelaziz Farhat, the event proved useful and informative.

Hamad Nasser Al Naimi has unforgettable memories of his visit to the Empire State Building, the American Museum of Natural History and he had an amazing time just strolling around Times Square. “This was my first visit to the U.S. and I enjoyed doing many things during the two weeks.”

Hamad is also considering a medical career but said his first priority was more practical and that he is getting into a suitable medical school.

I definitely recommend this scholarship to any person who can participate and compete as hard as he or she can to get it, because I think it is an opportunity that high school students won’t forget for as long as they live.”

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Tanzania mission challenges medical students

Not many students choose to spend the summer break working in a developing country’s hospital but Aseel Abu Dayya and Mohamed Amin, two second-year medical students at WCMC-Q recently returned from a challenging experience working at one such hospital - Weill Bugando Medical Center in Mbarara, Tanzania. The learning experience in a vastly different culture where resources are often scarce and opportunities limited was invaluable and intense. It opened their eyes to the medical needs of people who are less fortunate.

“This was truly an amazing experience. It was a needs of people who are less fortunate. intense. It opened their eyes to the medical culture where resources are often scarce,” Mohamed Amin, two second-year medical students with a focus on global health issues in developing countries.

The learning experience in a vastly different hospital - Weill Bugando Medical Center in Mbarara, Tanzania. The global health opportunity provides students with experience that complements their medical training and prepares them for medical practice anywhere in the world.

Aseel Abu Dayya with a young football fan

Mohamed Amin with a young football fan

“What is good about the global health scholarships is that you get to see and do so many different things in medicine and you also get an opportunity to get out and see new things and new places.”

The department of global and public health (GPH) at WCMC-Q sponsors two first-year medical students annually during the summer break for a global health experience in Tanzania. GPH provides scholarships to help pay for the students’ travel and living expenses.

Dr. Sohala Cheema, manager of the department, said applications for the scholarships will open early next year and she encouraged medical students to apply for this unique experience.

The global health opportunity provides students with experience that complements their medical training and prepares them for medical practice anywhere in the world.

Navigating the moral maze

WCMC-Q associate professor published in leading medical ethics journal

Recognizing a patient’s right to confidentiality is one of the most ethics issues arising in the medical world. The ethical dilemma facing doctors is to decide whether and when to break confidentiality, given that the patient has the right to decide what information can be shared or kept private.

The hypothetical situation posed by the AMA involves a 16-year-old male named Dylan who reveals to his long-time family physician, Dr. Emory, that he has been experiencing depression since the divorce of his parents 18 months ago. In a subsequent appointment, the patient says he has been having thoughts of self-harming, but has not acted on them. Dr. Emory recommends involving a therapist and the support of Dylan’s parents, but Dylan insists that the matter must remain confidential and asks instead to be prescribed an antidepressant. Dr. Emory believes a low-dose antidepressant could help but is reluctant to prescribe one, as Dylan is unwilling to schedule the follow-up appointment that such medication would require. Despite his mother’s insistence, Dylan will realize something is wrong.

In his commentary, Dr. del Pozo outlined the dilemma facing Dr. Emory: He can’t rush into the diagnosis of depression as it would necessitate breaking confidentiality, given that the patient’s parents would need close family monitoring. However, neither can he rule out such a diagnosis in the name of confidentiality, as it could put the patient at risk of harming himself. As the patient, Dylan is reluctant to discuss his feelings with his parents, but they are not widely practiced. So it’s good talk about what could happen any given day in any doctor’s office, which in the end is where most ethics issues arise.

In a subsequent appointment, the patient says he has been experiencing depression since the divorce of his parents 18 months ago. In a subsequent appointment, the patient says he has been having thoughts of self-harming, but has not acted on them. Dr. Emory recommends involving a therapist and the support of Dylan’s parents, but Dylan insists that the matter must remain confidential and asks instead to be prescribed an antidepressant. Dr. Emory believes a low-dose antidepressant could help but is reluctant to prescribe one, as Dylan is unwilling to schedule the follow-up appointment that such medication would require. Despite his mother’s insistence, Dylan will realize something is wrong. If Dylan’s grandmother – who could offer discreet monitoring and support.

Dr. del Pozo remarked: “The Virtual Mentor story reminds us that clinical judgment is inseparable from moral judgment. Every situation is different, which means that doctors must sometimes think creatively, often under the time pressure of a short consultation, in order to optimize the clinical outcome without compromising their ethical duties towards the patient. Vice-versa, doctors have to optimize the moral outcome without compromising their duty to provide excellent clinical care. In the end, this is the challenge, and the beauty of medicine.”

“The hypothetical scenario addressed by Dr. Pablo Rodriguez del Pozo, WCMC-Q’s associate professor of public health, when he was asked to submit an article to a special edition of Virtual Mentor, a monthly bioethics journal published by the American Medical Association (AMA), which focused on the issue of confidentiality.

The situation is complicated further if the patient in question is a minor suffering from a condition such as depression that can be difficult to diagnose, and adamantly insists that his or her parents not be informed. This was the hypothetical scenario addressed by Dr. Pablo Rodriguez del Pozo, WCMC-Q’s associate professor of public health, when he was asked to submit an article to a special edition of Virtual Mentor, a monthly bioethics journal published by the American Medical Association (AMA), which focused on the issue of confidentiality.

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Dr. del Pozo, who is in charge of the courses on medical ethics for WCMC-Q’s pre-medical and medical program, explained the relevance of the fictional scenario: “For me, the key was that this situation was an example of everyday ethics, which I feel is important to write about,” he said. “When we consider medical ethics there is a tendency to spend considerable efforts discussing subjects such as cloning, stem cells or genetic engineering. These are important areas but they are not widely practiced. So it’s good to talk about what could happen any given day in any doctor’s office, which in the end is where most ethics issues arise.”

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To read the full version of Dr. del Pozo’s article, see Virtual Mentor, American Medical Association Journal of Ethics, September 2012, Volume 14, Number 9: 695-700. http://virtualmentor.ama-assn.org/2012/9/vmca2-1209.html

By John Hayward
Researchers probe physicians’ policy of truth in cancer diagnosis

Cancer diagnosis can be a traumatic experience even at the best of times for a patient and often it generates an ethical dilemma for a physician whether to tell the truth or not.

A team of researchers led by WCMC-Q associate professor of public health in the division of medical ethics, Dr. Pablo Rodriguez del Pozo, and physicians from HMC and WCMC in New York looked into the attitudes and practices of physicians in Qatar. The findings were published in the August 2012 edition of The Oncologist, an international digest devoted to medical practice and issues for surgical, radiation, and medical oncologists.

The team of Dr. del Pozo included chief of the division of medical ethics at WCMC-New York Dr. Joseph J. Fins, Dr. Ismail Helmy from Hamad, Dr. Ziyad Mahfoud from WCMC-Q and students Rim El Chaki, Tank El Shalw and Dienia Wafadari.

Dr. del Pozo said the primary objective of this study was to assess physicians’ policies and practices toward informing patients of their cancer diagnosis. “We also aimed at exploring whether or not physicians’ disclosure policies and practices are associated with their socio-demographic, religious, cultural, and educational backgrounds,” he said.

In their study titled Truth-Telling and Cancer Diagnoses: Physician Attitudes and Practices in Qatar, the researchers found there is limited information regarding physicians’ attitudes toward revealing cancer diagnoses to patients in the Arab world.

The report highlighted that over the past half century, evolving medical ethics has identified the patient’s right to know his or her diagnosis and the physician’s reciprocal duty of disclosure as key elements of the informed consent process. But what began in the United States and has taken deep cultural roots in medical practice has not been universally assimilated into medical practices and cultural norms across the globe. In this paper, the researchers emphasized this evolving practice in the Arab-speaking world, with a focus on Qatar, which had remained untouched until now.

They found that there was rather limited information on physicians’ attitudes toward informing patients of cancer diagnoses in the Arabic speaking and Muslim world, although there seems to be a mosaic between what patients prefer and what doctors and families actually do.

“The primary objective of this study was to assess physicians’ policies and practices toward informing patients of their cancer diagnosis. We also aimed at exploring whether or not physicians’ disclosure policies and practices are associated with their socio-demographic, religious, cultural, and educational backgrounds,” Dr. del Pozo said.

The study was cross-sectional in nature, whereby a convenience sample of 131 physicians from nine different Hamad Medical Corporation hospitals and outpatient centers were given the study instrument to complete. All 131 physicians surveyed agreed to participate.

With regard to the central question of truth-telling, a large majority of respondents (88.6%) reported that their usual policy was to tell patients of their cancer diagnosis but, notably, a majority also revealed that they would make exceptions in rare cases (89.4%). The percentage of physicians who would make exceptions to their policy was significantly higher among physicians whose usual policy was to tell (74.1%) than among those whose usual policy was not to tell (23.1%). Moreover, there was fluidity in their views. A third of respondents said that their policy had changed over the years and about half thought that their policy would probably or certainly change in the future, although they did not specify whether the direction would be more forthcoming or not.

The most frequently reported factors that physicians would take into account when making an exception to truth-telling were the patient’s emotional stability (74.0%), age (88.6%), and perceived intelligence (67.7%). To a lesser extent, the patient’s sex (26%) and religion (25%) were perceived intelligence (67.7%). To a lesser extent, the patient’s sex (26%) and religion (25%) were

W ell Cornell Medical College in Qatar, in association with Hamad Medical Corporation, hosted faculty and staff at a medical education research retreat at the Doha Fitz Carlton on June 13 where the focus was on scholarship and academic publishing.

WCMC-Q dean, Dr. Javad Sheikh, who promoted the value of scholarly engagement, officially opened the three-day forum. Dr. Sheikh said the value of academic publishing and scholarly research cannot be underestimated as a means towards academic progress, delivering institutional value and contributing to cancer objectives like promotion and tenure.

In his opening address, Dr. Sheikh welcomed faculty and staff from WCMC-Q, Qatar University and HMC. “This is a workshop that is looking to get the faculty more into research on multiple levels. It is also an opportunity to look at how we can contribute to the larger literature of medical education research in a broader fashion,” said Dr. Sheikh.

Medical education retreat encourages scholarship and academic publishing

Biosafety training was the focus of attention for scientific and research staff at a WCMC-Q seminar hosted by internationally renowned expert Dr. Richard Gilpin.

As part of Weill Cornell Medical College in Qatar’s continuing commitment to education and training, Dr. Gilpin led a short course on biological safety principles and practices in June. Under discussion were a range of topics including risk management biosafety laboratory practices and emergency procedures.

Dr. Gilpin also led a short course in recombinant DNA and Institutional Biosafety Committee program implementation. This involved a variety of topics including the US National Institute of Health guidelines for research involving recombinant DNA molecules.

Dr. Gilpin is adjunct professor of microbiology and immunology at the University of Maryland School of Medicine and former compliance officer at the University of Maryland Biotechnology Institute, Central Administration.

The safety course was initiated for the benefit and capacity building of WCMC-Q’s research mission, supporting development of Qatar Foundation’s biomedical research program, and to provide outreach to the Qatar community in offering high quality training in support of Qatar’s mission to build a knowledge-based economy.
In his keynote address Dr. James Roach, associate professor of chemistry, encouraged them to continue to strive for excellence. The Dean’s Honors List was presented to students on their impressive academic achievements, Dr. Javaid Sheikh, dean of WCMC-Q, congratulated the students on their impressive academic achievements, and students were inducted to the Dean’s Honors List.

It was the second time in the 10-year history of WCMC-Q that high achieving students were honored. Students who successfully earned a 3.75 GPA or higher in the Spring 2012 term were selected on academic merit to receive the award. It was only the second time in the 10-year history of WCMC-Q that high achieving students were inducted to the Dean’s Honors List.

Dr. Javaid Sheikh, dean of WCMC-Q, presented the awards and congratulated the students on their impressive academic achievements, encouraging them to continue to strive for excellence. The Dean’s Honors List is now a bi-annual event on WCMC-Q’s academic calendar in recognition of dedication, hard work and high achievement by students.

“I am delighted to applaud the exceptional performance of these students as they are recognized for this significant academic honor. The Dean’s Honors List reflects the high caliber of WCMC-Q’s student body and it is the legacy of our endeavors to provide a stimulating medical program in a world-class environment,” said Dr. Sheikh.

“These young men and women have demonstrated an outstanding level of work to achieve this honor and their commitment and talent is inspiring to all at WCMC-Q. We are proud to support them and help them achieve their undoubtedly remarkable potential.”

In his keynote address Dr. James Roach, associate professor of chemistry in the pre-medical program, challenged the students to utilize their skills and talents. “We can through hard work and diligence increase our knowledge and hone our talents into skills that make the world a better place. Dr. through laziness and indifference, we can destroy our God-given potential,” he said.

“In medicine you have chosen a career through which your exceptional talents can profoundly enrich the lives of others. But don’t rest on the laurels of just talent alone … hone it, perfect it, get the absolute most out of your abilities. The extent of your talent will only be truly realized through dedication to your craft.”

WCMC-Q in first broadcast to Ithaca campus students

It was an historic occasion at WCMC-Q when the second-year pre-medical psychology class settled down on October 9 to greet Professor Harry Segal; it was the first time that a lecture was recorded and beamed from Doha to the students at Ithaca, New York.

The WCMC-Q students were all familiar with Professor Segal and his style of teaching but this time it was different. The professor that they had all come to love and learn from the small screen was right there in front of them and the cameras were ready to roll.

Psychology lectures are usually recorded and beamed from Ithaca to the students in Qatar but this time the students were waiting in Bailey Hall at Ithaca for Lecture 16 of Introduction to Psychology, on the topic Possible Selves (and more). Professor Segal recorded two lectures in Qatar that were shared with students in Ithaca.

WCMC-Q pre-medical student Omar Fahal said he was excited to be part of such an auspicious event. “I feel like I am involved in something that is quite unique. It is, for me, an exciting event in the history and development here at Weill Cornell Medical College in Qatar. We are celebrating the 10th anniversary this week and I am just happy to be a part of it all.

“Even if I graduate as a medical doctor some time in the future, I will always be able to say that I was there on campus and in the class when the first lecture was broadcast from Qatar to the students in the United States. Things will only get better and improve from here because this is an educational milestone for us,” Fahal said.

Professor Segal is a senior lecturer in psychology at Cornell University and senior lecturer in clinical psychology at WCMC-Q, who is involved in community psychology and also advises students on clinical careers.

“There is a wonderful cross-pollination going on and I commend students at Ithaca to consider spending some time here at WCMC-Q if they can,” Professor Segal said at the start of his lecture.

“I’ve had a wonderful visit to the medical school. The staff planned my trip with care down to the smallest detail, and the faculty were welcoming and a pleasure to meet with. All of them are dedicated to the students, and for good reason: they are a remarkable group.

“Students who came to office hours asked interesting questions, were polite and engaging, and I felt both lucky and honored to spend time with them. For several years the lectures had been recorded and shown here in Doha, so I was happy that the associate dean for premedical education, Dr. Marco Amend, and I were able to reverse the process and record lectures here to be shown to the Ithaca students. I’ve heard the recording looked great projected in Bailey Hall. Perhaps this is the start of a new tradition.”
Diego Lorenzetti, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Biology

Dr. Lorenzetti joined WCMC-Q in October 2012. Prior to coming to the college, he served as a visiting instructor of biology at Guilford College in Greensboro, North Carolina, where he taught biology survey courses and associated laboratories as well as an upper division course in molecular cell biology. Dr. Lorenzetti received a Ph.D. in human and molecular genetics from the Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston, Texas. His research interests focus on different areas of mammalian genetics, including generating animal models of inherited human neurological disease and identifying novel genes involved in spermatogenesis. He has held several research positions, including postdoctoral fellow in the department of immunology at MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston (2004-2005), research associate in the department of obstetrics and gynecology at Baylor College of Medicine (2005-2006), and scientist at Pluron Corporation in North Carolina (2008-2010).

Adam H. Larson, M.A.
Lecturer, English as a Second Language

Mr. Larson joined WCMC-Q in September 2012. Prior to coming to WCMC-Q, he served as a communications instructor and advanced writing center mentor at the College of the North Atlantic-Qatar in Doha. In addition to his duties as instructor and mentor, Mr. Larson was involved in course design and in the development of rubrics and course assignments. Mr. Larson’s research interests focus on the sociology of education, professional education, and higher education policy. He is particularly interested in how young people in the Gulf transition into post-secondary education and employment. Mr. Larson holds a master of arts in international studies from the University of Washington and is currently a doctor of education candidate at King’s College London.

JoAnn Peters, Ph.D.
Professor, Chemistry

Dr. Peters joined WCMC-Q in August 2012. Prior to joining WCMC-Q, she served as professor and chair in the department of chemistry at Central Washington University. Dr. Peters has more than 25 years of teaching experience in both lecture and laboratory settings at the undergraduate level. The majority of her teaching has been in the area of organic chemistry, and in this role she has contributed to the training of pre-medical students. She has taught in the general chemistry lecture and laboratory sequence at Central Washington University, as well as an interdisciplinary course, chemistry of materials for art, in the Honors College. In addition, she has played a key role in student advisement and has served on many department and university committees, including curriculum committees, search committees, committees responsible for promotion and tenure decisions, and safety committees. Dr. Peters has directed numerous undergraduate and M.S. level research projects, with funding from the National Science Foundation, American Chemical Society-Petroleum Research Fund, Oxy/Esso Foundation, and Research Corporation. She has published ten articles in peer-reviewed journals. Recent research interests include the conservation of plastic materials in museum settings.

Kuei-Chiu Chen, Ph.D.
Senior Lecturer, Biology

Dr. Chen joined WCMC-Q in August 2012. Prior to her arrival at WCMC-Q, she served as director of the investigative biology laboratory at Cornell University. In that role, she developed and implemented modern laboratory topics focusing on scientific investigations, lectured weekly on lab topics, trained and supervised lab instructors, and directed the day-to-day operation of lab courses. Additionally, she was involved in advising freshman students. Dr. Chen’s research interests focus on population genetics and phylogeography on lower vertebrates using molecular markers. In recent years, this interest has been extended to human populations using 10 microsatellite DNA loci as markers. She has published four articles in peer-reviewed journals and two more have been submitted. She has co-authored several books and has presented her research at several professional conferences.
Dr. Roach returns to WCMC-Q after serving one year as interim chair of the department of physical sciences at Emporia State University.

During his previous appointment at WCMC-Q, Dr. Roach was renowned as an exceptional teacher who was very highly regarded by faculty, staff, and students alike. Dr. Roach’s outstanding performance and dedication to teaching were recognized with the WCMC Excellence in Teaching Award in 2010 and 2011.

Dr. Roach received a Ph.D. in physical chemistry in 1996 from the University of Oklahoma. He is a chemist with an outstanding teaching career that spans almost fifteen years at universities in the United States and the Middle East, including Campbellsville University in Kentucky, Emporia State University, and Alfaisal University in Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Dr. Roach’s research interests focus specifically on the uses of colloidal systems in wastewater remediation, enhanced oil recovery, seawater desalination, and chemical education. During his career, he has attracted several grants to fund his research, first authored six papers in peer-reviewed journals, and presented his research at several professional conferences.

Dr. Najafi-Shoushtari joined WCMC-Q in January 2012 as assistant professor of cell and developmental biology. Prior to joining WCMC-Q, he served as research associate in the department of medicine at the University of Illinois in Chicago (2005 – 2007), and as a research fellow in the department of cell biology at Harvard Medical School and the Massachusetts General Hospital Cancer Center (2007 – 2012).

Considered a true expert in the field of non-coding RNAs and the biology of lipid metabolism, his research interests focus around studies in the gene expression field. His efforts have been dedicated to understanding the role of microRNAs in cholesterol/lipid homeostasis with an emphasis on defining new mechanisms of major human diseases associated with obesity, type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disorders. His discovery of the role and function of miR-33 in regulating plasma HDL levels has led more recently to the development of novel potential therapeutic strategies for the treatment of abnormal lipid levels. He combines genetics, biochemistry, genomics, and computational tools to map critical points for metabolic control by microRNAs and to explore how these molecules involved are connected and orchestrated at the systems-level with emphasis on clinical relevance and implications in cardiometabolic disease.
Happenings


Actor Adam Driver performs a reading from The End of Life.

U.S. director Bryan Doerries discusses the issues raised by the play The End of Life.

Yanal Shaheen and Lama Obeid perform the dabka dance at International Night.

Some students wore national dress at International Night.

Student Christina Rhee plays the flute for her performance at International Night.

Khalid Al-Marri, Shaikha Al-Thani, Aldana Shahbik, Shaykhah Alqahtani and Alaa Al-Naama man the Qatar booth at International Night.


Some students wore national dress at International Night.
Med students Vignesh Shanmugam and Muhammad Panhwar enjoy a cup of Arabic coffee served by classmate Khalid Al-Marri.

Foundation students visit the Museum of Islamic Art as part of a field trip.

Finance director Moiz Motawala cuts the cake at his leaving event.

Rasha Abou Hazima, Tasneem Mazahir, Deepa Sreedharan, Sandra Pais, Joanne Sarao and Diana Serrao celebrate with Moiz Motawala at his farewell party.