



WEILL CORNELL MEDICAL COLLEGE IN QATAR



PRESS RELEASE

Summer of Discovery for Medical Students

Doha, 3 July 2006: A group of six medical students from Weill Cornell Medical College in Qatar (WCMC-Q) leaves Doha International Airport tonight (July 4) en route to New York City, where they are to join teams of investigators in the labs of Weill Cornell Medical College.

Ahead of them lie eight weeks working at the cutting edge of biomedical research and living the daily life of Weill Cornell students in the Big Apple.

In addition, two of their colleagues start work this month on a research project in Doha, the second year that WCMC-Q medical students are carrying out research-based work on home ground.

Capturing the sense of excitement shared by his colleagues in the Class of 2009, Imran Farooq said he was motivated to apply for a summer research fellowship by inspirational lectures on stem cells and gene therapy given by top researchers from the Medical College in New York City, Dr. Shahin Rafii and Dr. Ronald Crystal, during the past academic year.

Dr. Crystal, who is Chairman of the Department of Genetic Medicine, delivered the inaugural Hamad Bin Khalifa Lecture at WCMC-Q last December. The lecture by Dr. Rafii was given in the context of a basic science course in the medical curriculum.

"Watching the lectures, and seeing the enthusiasm the faculty displayed, triggered something and made me decide: 'I want to see what it's all about,'" he said.

Along with Amira El Sherif, Heba Haddad, Manisha Deb Roy, Noor Al Khorri and Zeinab Ammous, Farooq was awarded a fellowship in a competitive selection process, said WCMC-Q's Senior Associate Dean for Research, Dr. Gary Schneider.

"We choose those students that are academically very solid and have an aptitude for, and would really flourish in, a research environment."

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They will work in labs with teams of up to 50, including medical and doctoral students, post-doctoral fellows and research staff. Each student is guided by at least one mentor to ease the adjustment to a new environment.

The tasks they carry out will vary across labs, but may consist of data gathering and analysis, including patient interviewing; experiments at the bench; and observation of clinical procedures. The students will also attend regular lab meetings, take part in educational activities and, in some cases, make a presentation to the research team.

Meanwhile, class members Sara Hassan and Aalia Al Barwani are participating in a project here in Doha. Researchers at Weill Cornell in New York City and in Qatar are collaborating with investigators at Hamad Medical Corporation on a study of patients with lung conditions, part of a larger pulmonary gene expression study conducted by Dr. Crystal's team in New York City. The Doha group is led by professor of genetic medicine at WCMC-Q, Dr. Lotfi Chouchane.

Understanding the process of research

A key purpose of the summer program is to enhance understanding of the process of research, rather than to involve the young physicians-in-training in projects that are directly related to their current studies.

Dr. Crystal, who is also professor of genetic medicine at Weill Cornell in New York City, emphasized that such experience prepares the students for lifelong learning, by equipping them to fully understand what they read in the literature.

"If students do not have research experience, they lose the opportunity to develop an in-depth understanding of what research is all about," he said. "If they do not understand what a PCR (polymerase chain reaction) is about, they cannot read and understand major medical journals."

Qatari student Noor Al Khori believes the experience will give her valuable insight into an area she has not experienced in practice: "It's one thing to read about research in a paper, and another thing to be involved in it – it's very rigorous. I want to learn how to design an experiment, how you assign people to different tasks in the lab, how new research builds on past work, and how to write a research paper," she said.

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Making a contribution

Students may also contribute new ideas, Dr. Crystal noted: "We have had many students who generate new ideas that become important research goals. Over the years, many have contributed to research papers including some where the student is the first author. They have also presented talks at national and international meetings."

The summer research fellows will be expected to present their findings at WCMC-Q's Annual Medical Student Research Forum held in the fall semester – their first taste of this important aspect of scientific research, Dr. Schneider said.

"Part of the process of research is learning how to write an abstract, how to present the data, and how to coordinate and analyze the data. The Research Forum is a means to give them a first approach to understanding presentations as well. Many are going to be presenting at national or international meetings some time during their life."

Finding their feet in New York

Outside the labs, the students are looking forward to joining in daily life in New York. Some, such as Farooq, have lived in New York; some have visited it as tourists or during a previous research fellowship.

For others, the eight-week trip is a new experience. In the case of Ammous, it means leaving behind her young son, but her family are completely behind her: "Two months without my family, and in New York for the first time, is going to be hard. But all of them are excited and supporting me," she said.

The group could also link up with other WCMC-Q students, currently at Cornell University's main campus in Ithaca, upstate New York. Six students from the Class of 2010, who recently completed the Pre-medical Program at WCMC-Q, are already hard at work in the labs there, the first contingent of this year's summer research fellows.

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NOTES TO EDITORS

Established in partnership with Qatar Foundation, WCMC-Q is part of the Weill Medical College of Cornell University, the first American institution to offer its MD degree overseas. WCMC-Q offers a complete and integrated educational program, comprising the two-year Pre-medical Program, followed by the four-year Medical Program, with teaching by Cornell faculty. There are separate admission processes for each Program, guided by the standards of admission in use at Cornell University in Ithaca, and its Medical College in New York City.

Website: www.qatar-med.cornell.edu

Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development is a private, nonprofit, chartered organization founded in 1995 aiming to develop and utilize human potential through a network of centers and campuses. In 1997 the Foundation set out on a strategic plan to create an Education City that is composed of a number of research centers, branch campuses of world-class educational institutions and a Science Park that acts as an incubator for research, responds to the immediate needs of industry and anticipates future necessities for development. In October 2003, Education City was officially inaugurated and it is now home to branches of some of the world's leading universities and research centers.

Website: www.qf.org.qa

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