

High School Research Competition: A novel outreach initiative by WCM-Q

Doha – June 4, 2017: Students from high schools across Qatar met at Weill Cornell Medicine-Qatar (WCM-Q) to compete in a research poster contest aimed at inspiring talented young people to pursue careers in medicine.

Twenty-three student teams from 14 schools presented posters at the High School Research Competition event, with topics ranging from the prevalence of vitamin D deficiency in Qatar, to the impact of type-2 diabetes, to public attitudes to mass transport systems in Qatar, among many others.

Earlier this year, the Office of Student Recruitment and Outreach announced its first High School Medical Conference for local and international schools in Qatar, as a pilot initiative. The main aim of the conference is not only to raise awareness about the excellent careers that medicine has to offer but also foster a palpable interest in the Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) tracks.

The High School Research Competition is one element of WCM-Q's new High School Medical Conference, a three-part outreach initiative that also comprises a series of professional development workshops designed for teachers and counselors who advise students interested in careers in medicine. The third element is an exhibition to be held at WCM-Q on November 11. The top selected teams will be offered the opportunity to present at the High School Medical Conference, which will be held on November 10 and 11. During the conference, three finalist teams will compete to win valuable prizes. First prize in the contest is an educational trip to Weill Cornell Medicine in New York for the winning students and their school supervisor.

Dr. Rachid Bendriss, Assistant Dean for Student Recruitment, Outreach and Foundation Programs, said: "I want to congratulate every team and every single student that entered a research poster in the competition because the standard was exceptionally high. We were extremely impressed by the quality of the research, the very high level of presentation and the deep understanding each student demonstrated about his or her subject area.

"The judges are going to have a hard time choosing the winners, but by researching difficult subject matter and presenting it with confidence and assuredness today, you are in fact all winners."

In addition to presenting their research in poster form, the students also had to explain their findings to the WCM-Q faculty on the panel of judges, which comprised Dr. Bendriss, Dr. Dietrich Büsselberg, Professor of Physiology and Biophysics, Dr. Raphael Courjaret, Research Associate in Physiology and Biophysics, Dr. Sohaila Cheema, Director of the Institute for Population Health, and Dr. Yasser Majeed, Postdoctoral Associate in Microbiology and Immunology.

It proved to be a nerve-racking but exciting experience for Noura Rakab and Yasmin Zamel, both aged 16, from American School of Doha, who presented a poster about the implications for public policy of vitamin D deficiency in Qatar, which they worked on with Aya Al Thani and Maryam Hussain under the supervision of their teacher, Pamela Keigley. Noura said: "We really enjoyed the research and the event because it was a challenge that took us out of our comfort zone and made us push ourselves further



than we thought was possible.” Yasmin said: “We are both really interested in careers in medicine so it was great to work on this project together. We are looking forward to applying to medical school next year.”

Each team was paired with a WCM-Q teaching specialist or faculty member who provided useful guidance on how to refine the research questions, conduct research and interpret data. The teaching specialists who actively engaged with the students were: Dr. Ali Chaari, Dr. Majda Sebah, Dr. Nandoo Choony, Dr. Branislav Aleksic, Ms. Melanie Fernandes, Ms. Robin Theron and Mr. Anthony Overy, in addition to faculty member Dr. Ghizlane Bendriss.

Noha Saleh, Director of Student Recruitment and Outreach, said: “This was the first event of our new High School Medical Conference initiative, which we have designed to reach out to highly motivated and talented high school students to help them realize their ambitions of becoming Qatar’s next generation of medical leaders.

“We are delighted with the enthusiastic response we received from high schools, students and teachers, and we look forward to welcoming them back to WCM-Q for the culmination of the High School Medical Conference on November 10-11.”

More information about the conference is available at: <http://events.qatar-weill.cornell.edu/high-school-medical-conference/index.html>

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Photo Captions:

Photo1: A high school student from Bright Future International School explains her team’s research to competition judge Dr. Dietrich Büsselberg of WCM-Q at the college’s High School Research Competition.

Photo2: Twenty-three student teams from 14 schools presented posters at the WCM-Q High School Research Competition event.

Photo3: WCM-Q became a hive of activity as high school students convened to take part in the college’s High School Research Competition event.

Photo4: Students from Michael E. DeBakey discuss their research project at the WCM-Q High School Research Competition event.

About Weill Cornell Medicine - Qatar

Weill Cornell Medicine - Qatar is a partnership between Cornell University and Qatar Foundation. It offers a comprehensive six-year medical program leading to the Cornell University M.D. degree with teaching by Cornell and Weill Cornell faculty and by physicians at Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC), Aspetar Orthopedic and Sports Medicine Hospital, the Primary Health Care Corporation, the Feto Maternal Center, and the Sidra Medical and Research Center who hold Weill Cornell appointments.



Through its biomedical research program, WCM-Q is building a sustainable research community in Qatar while advancing basic science and clinical research. Through its medical college, WCM-Q seeks to provide the finest education possible for medical students, to improve health care both now and for future generations, and to provide high quality health care to the Qatari population.

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