

New England Science Symposium

THE FOURTH ANNUAL NEW ENGLAND Science Symposium, co-sponsored by the Harvard Medical School Office of Diversity and Community Partnership, Minority Faculty Development Program, and the Biomedical Science Careers Program (BSCP), took place on March 4 at The Conference Center at Harvard Medical in Boston. Based on the number of abstracts received (143) and the quality of those abstracts, it was the most successful New England Science Symposium to date.

Joan Y. Reede, MD, MPH, MS, dean for Diversity and Community Partnership and associate professor of Medicine at Harvard Medical School and president and chair of BSCP, opened the session with an overview of the day. She was followed by Jabbar R. Bennett, PhD, science curriculum and program specialist, Office for Diversity and Community Partnership at Harvard Medical School and a BSCP student advisor.

Most of the morning was devoted to oral presentations of scientific research from undergraduates, medical students, PhD candidates and post-doctoral fellows. The presenters were introduced by Shauna R. Hutchinson, a BSCP student, and Vincent Smith, MD, MPH, an instructor at Harvard Medical School and BSCP student advisor.

Following the presentations, Vincent I. Ahonkhai, MD, FAAP, delivered the keynote address. Dr. Ahonkhai is vice president of U.S. Regulatory Affairs, Vaccines, at GlaxoSmithKline Pharmaceuticals (see related story, page 2). In his address, "Do They Have Room for Me?," Dr. Ahonkhai encouraged students to pursue advanced degrees, noting that minorities are not well represented in the pharmaceutical industry. He suggested that attendees get involved in clinical trials and drug research and development, and seek management positions at pharmaceutical

companies, with the goal of becoming influential people in the pharmaceutical field whose work and decisions could benefit people of color.



STUDENTS AND MENTORS AT THE NEW ENGLAND SCIENCE SYMPOSIUM

The afternoon session featured more oral presentations, introduced by Vincent Smith and Mayra E. Lorenzo, MD, PhD, a medical intern at Brigham and Women's Hospital who is a former BSCP student and Hope Scholarship Recipient. The afternoon also featured 51 scientific poster presentations.

After the poster presentations, Dr. William Silen presented the Ruth and William Silen, MD Awards, which were given for the best oral and poster presentations. For oral presentations, the prizes went to Joeli Marrero, PhD candidate, Tufts University School of Medicine, first prize (\$300); Samuel Waters, PhD, post-doctoral fellow, National Cancer Institute, second prize (\$200); and Jaime Imitola, MD, post-doctoral fellow, Center for Neurologic Diseases, Brigham and Women's Hospital, third prize (\$100). For poster presentations, the prizes went to Elysia Alvarez, undergraduate student, Clark University, first prize (\$300); Natasha Viquez, MD/PhD candidate, Washington University, second prize

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SPECIAL THANKS TO

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UPCOMING EVENTS

BIOMEDICAL SCIENCE CAREERS STUDENT CONFERENCE

Friday, March 10 and
Saturday, March 11, 2006

The Boston Park Plaza Hotel

The eighth biennial Biomedical Science Careers Student Conference for post-doctoral fellows, medical/dental, graduate and college students, and high school seniors and juniors, sponsored by the Biomedical Science Careers Program, will take place on March 10 and 11, 2006, at The Boston Park Plaza Hotel. The objective of the conference is to encourage students to pursue and complete advanced studies. In addition to keynote addresses, students will attend panel discussions and workshops designed to lead students through the process of applying to, and gaining acceptance to, college, medical, and graduate schools as well as to competitive, advanced training programs and on subjects ranging from "Constructing your Career Agenda" to "Funding and Research Opportunities" to "Fellowships and Postdoctoral Training: Opportunities Beyond a Degree." The participants will be matched with advisors/role models from academia, hospitals/medical centers, the federal government and the biotechnology industry. There is no registration fee, but pre-registration is required. Applications will be available in October 2005.

To obtain an application or for more information, please contact Lise D. Kaye at lise_kaye@hms.harvard.edu or 617.432.0552.

Mentor Profile

Vincent I. Ahonkhai, MD, FAAP

VINCENT I. AHONKHAÏ, MD, FAAP, arrived in the U.S. in 1975, with a medical degree from the University of Lagos College of Medicine in Nigeria, to continue his studies. He completed his pediatric residency and fellowship in adult and pediatric infectious diseases at SUNY-Downside Medical Center in Brooklyn, New York, where he later joined the faculty as an assistant professor of infectious diseases in the Department of Pediatrics.

In 1982, after teaching and practicing medicine, Dr. Ahonkhai, who was the keynote speaker at the 2005 BSCP New England Science Symposium, entered the pharmaceutical industry, joining Merck Sharp & Dohme Research Laboratories. He decided to make a career in the industry because, "It has become abundantly clear to me that your influence carries over to hundreds of thousands — maybe millions — of people, as opposed to clinical practice, where your influence is one on one. It's much more fulfilling to me than what I was doing in clinical practice.

"It also gives you a great opportunity to work with people at the cutting edge of science



VINCENT I. AHONKHAÏ, MD, FAAP

worldwide — and there's sufficient funding to do what you want," he continues. Dr. Ahonkhai adds that his medical training has been invaluable in his pharmaceutical work and notes that there are well over 1,000 physicians in the industry.

Today he is vice president, U.S. Regulatory Affairs, at GlaxoSmithKline Pharmaceuticals (GSK), specializing in vaccines. His group serves as a liaison to the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), ensuring that the company's products meet FDA standards at every phase, from clinical trials through marketing of licensed products. Before taking this position two years ago, Dr. Ahonkhai spent eight years at GSK working in clinical trials. He feels his current position "expands [his] skill set and scope of experience."

In the 20-plus years he has spent in the pharmaceutical industry, Dr. Ahonkhai has noted

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Evening of Hope

THE EIGHTH ANNUAL BSCP EVENING of Hope took place on April 14 at The Boston Park Plaza Hotel. The organization's annual fundraising event brings together leaders from health care, the biosciences, education, and other leading businesses to raise money for BSCP programs and to celebrate BSCP successes in the community. Since the organization was created in 1991, more than 4,500 students and 500 post-doctoral fellows and junior faculty have participated in BSCP programs, which are always offered at no cost to the students.

Frank L. Douglas, MD, PhD, executive-in-residence at the Sloan School of Management at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and former chief scientific officer at Aventis, and Lise D. Kaye, executive director, Biomedical Science Careers Program, were honored for their work in promoting justice, fairness, and the advancement of youth, particularly on

behalf of minorities and the disadvantaged. Five tireless individuals who have volunteered their time and expertise to BSCP over the years were named to the 2005 Honor Roll: Trevor P. Castor, PhD, president and chief executive officer, Aphios Corporation; Yvonne Gomez-Carrion, MD, FACOG, Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center; Chris Hwang, PhD, Genzyme Corporation; Michael Parr, PhD, Biogen Idec; and Laura Riley, MD, Massachusetts General Hospital.

Six BSCP students were awarded Hope Scholarships at the event. Each of the students will receive \$7,500 over two years, to be used for academic purposes. Funding for the scholarships came from AstraZeneca R&D Boston, Biogen Idec Foundation, Boston Scientific Corporation, The Fleming Family Foundation, Inc. and MassMEDIC, Genzyme Corporation,

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Student Profile

Elysia Alvarez

IN A FIELD OF 51 POSTER PRESENTATIONS at the 2005 New England Science Symposium — from undergraduates, graduate students, medical students, and PhD candidates — it was the presentation of Clark University undergraduate Elysia Alvarez, a senior from Fremont, California, that took first prize. Alvarez has been a BSCP student since 2004.

Working in the laboratory of Clark University professor and anthrax researcher Donald J. Nelson, PhD, who was a co-author of the research, Alvarez's research focused on understanding aspects of lethal factor protein in anthrax that cause it to interact with peptide substrate analogs and to bind to protective antigens. This kind of understanding could lead the way to the development of prophylactic and therapeutic drugs for dealing with anthrax exposure.

"I am interested in infectious disease, and [Dr. Nelson] asked me to join his lab," explains the biochemistry and molecular biology major. "I'm also working with a PhD candidate, Jingyan Zhao. I was really surprised that I won."

After she graduates this spring, Alvarez, who has enjoyed her time at Clark but is ready to leave New England behind (after this winter, who wouldn't be?), will return to California to work in the adolescent clinic at Children's Hospital Oakland (CHO), an inner-city hospital where she has worked before. In her new job, which is funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH), Alvarez will research adolescent health care. "The job appealed to me because I will be interacting with high-risk adolescent patients every day and can hopefully be a part of improving the opportunities available to them."



ELYSIA ALVAREZ SHOWS HER POSTER TO MAX L. TEJADA, PHD, OF GENENTECH.

Alvarez says she first became interested in infectious disease two years ago, when she worked in a chlamydia clinic at CHO. Last summer she returned to the hospital, and was involved in a clinical research project in the adolescent clinic. Every patient who comes into the clinic has an assessment that screens for negative and/or dangerous behaviors. Alvarez's job was to make sure the assessments were consistent for all patients.

CHO, where one clinic has the highest homicide rate in California and another is known for the high number of prostitutes it serves, is a far cry from Alvarez's work in the anthrax laboratory, or any other part of her life. She says it is very different for her and very rewarding.

While she is working at the hospital, Alvarez will also apply to medical school. Ultimately, she hopes to earn an MD, but her back-up plan, if she is not accepted to medical school, is to work toward a PhD. "I want to practice medicine and do research," she says. "I believe an MD will give me more flexibility than a straight PhD," she notes. Alvarez would also like to earn a master's degree in Public Health. There is no doubt her education and talents will be well used. ■

"I was invited to speak at two institutions and perhaps will be able to develop several useful research collaborations" as a result of attending the symposium. Thomasina Bailey, a poster presenter and medical student at Mount Sinai School of Medicine in New York, added, "It was... wonderful... and encouraging to hear the panelists. Their words will fuel me to work harder in the lab so that some day I can be where they are." ■

ANNOUNCEMENTS

SUMMER INTERNSHIPS

The Molecular and Genomic Imaging Center, a consortium of research groups at Harvard, MIT, and Washington University, is looking for qualified undergraduate students from underrepresented minority groups to participate in a 10-week summer research program. Students will perform research in the field of genomics.

Students will be paid a stipend of \$4,000 for 10 weeks of residence in the program, which runs from June 1, 2005 to Sept. 1, 2005. Application deadline is May 1, 2005. Seniors graduating in 2005 are not eligible.

To apply, email Cindy Vallaro at Cvallaro@genetics.med.harvard.edu or call 617-423-7562.

The Center for Cancer Research is recruiting college and university students from under-represented groups and/or a disadvantaged background with an interest in cancer-related research.

To apply, interested students can go online to www.training.nih.gov, or send an email to Jonathan Wiest at jw4241@nih.gov or VI Black at vb55k@nih.gov. Deadline for application is June 1.

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(\$200); and Elizabeth Glater, PhD candidate, Harvard Medical School, third prize (\$100).

The day concluded with a networking reception. Denise Perry Simmons, PhD, an oral presenter and fellow at the National Cancer Institute Center for Cancer Research, who attended from Bethesda, Maryland, noted,

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the striking absence of minorities. "It's a huge problem," he says. "The usual excuse is, there are not enough qualified applicants, or people don't stay. [As a result,] drugs being developed don't take into account the full breadth of the U.S. population. Clinical trials under represent minority populations. Employers offering such an excuse need to know about the talent pool within BSCP and similar programs."

As a first-time attendee at a BSCP function, Dr. Ahonkhai was very impressed by what he saw in March and encourages students involved with the

program to consider the pharmaceutical industry. "MDs, PhDs, and other people with science backgrounds can get into the pharmaceutical industry," he says. "There is a pool of resources far larger than that of the government or academia. The annual Research and Development budget at GSK alone is four billion dollars," he notes.

Anyone interested, he advises, should "go and knock on doors. Check companies' websites, seek out scientific forums where people from these companies are likely to be, contact the companies directly. You have no chance if you don't try." And seek out mentors like Dr. Ahonkhai, who are more than happy to share their experiences and bring more talented, dedicated people into the field. ■

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and Millennium Pharmaceuticals, Inc. The Hope Scholars are: Lurn Contreras, a dual baccalaureate candidate majoring in Biological Chemistry and Theoretical Mathematics at Wellesley College and Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT); Amara Ezeamama, a doctoral candidate in the graduate program in Epidemiology at Brown University; Adrian Kenny, a student at Harvard Medical School; Lili Peng, an undergraduate majoring in Chemical Engineering at MIT; Nery Porras, a senior at Brookline High School; and Judah Weathers, a student at Yale University School of Medicine.

BSCP Corporate Leaders, who each donated \$25,000 to the organization this year, were Biogen Idec Foundation, Boston Scientific Corporation, Genzyme Corporation, Goldman, Sachs & Co., and Novartis Institutes for BioMedical Research. ■

CORRECTION

ON PAGE 2 OF THE JANUARY 2005 ISSUE OF THE NEWSLETTER, WE INCORRECTLY RAN THE NAME ANGELO GREEN, PHD, UNDER THE PHOTO OF ALFRED C. JOHNSON, PHD.