High School Student Symposium: Careers Off to a Sunny Start in Orlando

By Menaka Pai, MD

On Friday, 75 students from Orlando high schools attended a special symposium hosted by the American Society of Hematology. The 12th Annual High School Student Symposium was held in conjunction with the 48th ASH Annual Meeting with the goals of sparking interest in science and medical research and spotlighting career opportunities in hematology and medical research.

The event began with a breakfast for the students hosted by Dr. Joseph Mikhael, a hematologist at Princess Margaret Hospital in Toronto, Canada. Dr. Mikhael offered his perspective on a career in medicine and the rewards that come with pairing clinical service with research. When asked why he participates in the High School Student Symposium, Dr. Mikhael said, "this unique program gets students interested in science, so it's an honor to be involved. And who knows — maybe a future President of ASH is in the room!"

The symposium is about more than education — it's a fun morning of interactive lectures and hands-on demonstrations which bring hematology to life. This year, sickle cell disease was the theme of the symposium. After breakfast, students interacted with two featured speakers — Dr. Kenneth Ataga, of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and Dr. Richard Lottenberg of the University of Florida. With the help of their own sickle cell patients, Dr. Ataga and Dr. Lottenberg walked the students through the diagnosis, clinical manifestations, and treatment of sickle cell disease. Students also participated in a whirlwind of activities such as DNA analysis, DNA synthesis, and diagnostic techniques for anemia of sickle cell. The day ended with lunch and the announcement of the winners of the poster contest, in which five Orlando area schools were selected to submit a total of ten posters. The top posters earned cash awards, which were given to the science departments of their schools.

Since 1994, the annual High School Student Symposium has given young adults a unique look at the exciting field of biomedical sciences. It highlights the commitment of the American Society of Hematology to education at all levels.