THE UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH SCHOLARLY PROJECT – INITIAL EXAMPLES OF SUCCESS

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Purpose: Analytical thought and rational decision-making are the hallmarks of modern medical practice. For this reason the University of Pittsburgh introduced a required scholarly project (SP) into the curriculum starting with the graduating class of 2008. The goals of the SP are to:

1. Foster analytical thinking skills and the development of tools for rational decision-making in future physicians;
2. Provide role models, mentorship, and guidance for students regarding careers that integrate research, teaching, and clinical service;
3. Enhance the medical school culture of self-directed and peer group-fostered learning;
4. Enhance the oral and written communication skills of graduating medical students.

This exhibit presents three examples of SPs completed by University of Pittsburgh students.

Methods: Students are able to work on their SP through all four years of medical school and can spend focused time by completing summer research between the first and second year and mentored electives during the third and fourth years. Students may choose their mentored research theme from a wide array of possibilities, from outcomes research to evolutionary molecular biology. Students officially propose a project in January of the second year and must submit their final report in January of the fourth year.

Results: Three students will present their work in (1) Understanding the role of HMGBI in Tumor Progression (2) Effect of Hemorrhagic Shock After Experimental Traumatic Brain Injury in Mice and (3) Clinical Outcome with Adjuvant Treatment of Endometrial Carcinoma using Intensity-Modulated Radiation Therapy. The work of these students is representative of the work of many of their classmates.

Conclusion: Students are able to be very productive on their Scholarly Projects during the four year medical curriculum. These projects and their outcomes demonstrate the achievability of the SP program goals, including development of in-depth knowledge in a focused area, the ability to synthesize and critically evaluate published work by others, and the generation and completion of new studies that advance the health sciences. Through this mandatory curricular element we hope to interest more students in research careers, and to endow all of our graduates with the confidence needed to be creative and analytical clinicians.