



HOLMDEL TOWNSHIP SCHOOL DISTRICT

"A COMMITMENT TO EXCELLENCE"

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HOLMDEL STUDENT RECEIVES RESEARCH AWARD AND INTERNSHIP

Rising Holmdel High School senior to spend summer conducting research at the Cancer Institute of New Jersey

HOLMDEL (June 5, 2017) – Holmdel High School junior, Hamzah Shaikh, was recently named as one of 100 recipients from around the country to be awarded the Empire Science Award, an initiative designed to encourage high school students to explore careers in science, specifically cancer research and care.

According to the Award website, The Emperor Science Award program is committed to helping all students who have a passion for science join the next generation of cancer researchers. Through this award program, 100 winning students from across the country will be paired with a university-level mentoring scientist to collaborate on an important cancer research project. Whether virtually, or in a lab, students will be able to connect with their mentors to develop valuable research, organization and communication skills.

Sponsored by PBS Learning Media, a digital educational resource library for teachers and students, and Stand Up To Cancer, a program of the Entertainment Industry Foundation, the award received nearly 800 applications from eligible 10th and 11th grade students in 44 states throughout the U.S. who are interested in pursuing a career in science research. Prominent scientists served as judges and evaluated the students' applications, which were written essays, addressing why scientific research is so important in finding a cure for cancer, what scientific field they would study and why.

Holmdel's recipient, junior Hamzah Shaikh, was both thrilled and humbled by the award. He says he was encouraged to compose his essay based both on his interest in science and by reading the testimonials of past award recipients who really valued this unique research experience. Shaikh explained, "It's difficult to get professional opportunities like this, especially as a high school student, but the program promised to involve winners in cutting edge science research ranging from immunotherapy to genetics, which I found very appealing. I felt passionate about the essay topic and felt this would be a great way to jump start my research career, so I applied and submitted the essay." He said that he finds cellular and molecular biology fascinating, and that he plans on continuing his work in this field on the college level.

His essay aimed to provide an insightful response to the question posed. The question read: Cancer has been referred to as the "Emperor of all Maladies" and millions of people around the world are looking for a cure. In America, over 1,600 people die each day from the disease. Tell

us why scientific research is so important to help find a cure for cancer. And, if *you* could be a scientific researcher, what would you study and why? Shaikh's response focused on scientific research and how it enables us to understand the causes of cancer and allows us to develop safe drugs and therapies. He cited, "I emphasized that research helps us challenge the false notion that cancer is an incurable disease," and how the promising field of precision medicine was an area he would like to study as a future scientist.

Shaikh will not have to wait long for the "future" part of the scientist goal, however. The award comes with a Google Chromebook, a \$1500 stipend for research expenses, and a twelve-week cancer research internship at the Cancer Institute of New Jersey. Over the summer he will be working with Dr. Darren Carpizo, who directs the Hepatobiliary Program at CINJ as a Surgical Oncologist and has made impressive strides in his field. Shaikh is uncertain what his project will be at the moment, but is really looking forward to learning about how cancer research is conducted and the various laboratory techniques used by researchers. He hopes to use the experience to help mentor other Holmdel science students next year.

Dr. Josephine Blaha, Shaikh's teacher in Honors Advance Research at Holmdel High School, had nothing but praise for the effort he has put forth as her student over the last two years. His work at the Waksman Student Scholars Program Summer Institute at Rutgers University last summer practicing laboratory techniques used in DNA sequencing allowed him to serve as Dr. Blaha's teacher assistant during the academic year of the project. Throughout the year he helped fellow students isolate, sequence, and analyze their own sequences and answer any questions they had about the theory or process. As a class, they are currently looking to have over 30 sequences published on the National Center for Biotechnology Information database this year, a feat Blaha is bowled over by, as she proudly explains that "the research conducted by the students is all original, and prepares them for the challenges of college research and beyond".

Holmdel offers students many opportunities in the sciences, including Science League, Science Olympiad, in addition to classes like Honors Advanced Research and numerous AP courses, all of which Shaikh has taken full advantage of in his last three years. When asked what his plans are after graduating high school, he gave a promising response for a sixteen year old. He offered "I'm not a hundred percent sure what I want to do as a career, but I've narrowed it down to two options. One is pursuing a career in medicine as a physician. But more recently, I've looked into combining my passion for science with my interest in government and politics. I think it would be really cool to work on public policy and address emerging issues in health and science." Yeah, we think that would be pretty cool, too, Hamzah. Thank you for your dedication and hard work. The future is in good hands.