

07/04/09 06:50 AM

SCIENCE EDUCATION

Students try their hands at targeting tumors with potent computing power

By Ja'Nay Carswell
NEWS STAFF REPORTER

A group of budding scientists got a chance Friday to use top-of-the-line computer technology to develop plans for treating cancer.

The 10 students channeled the University at Buffalo's supercomputers to formulate a treatment plan for a hypothetical tumor.

The exercise was part of UB's "Eric Pitman Annual Summer Workshop in Computational Science," named in honor of Eric Pitman, a St. Joseph's Collegiate Institute freshman who died in 2007 after a brief illness. The two-week program is based in UB's Center for Computation Research, at the Center of Excellence in Bioinformatics and Life Sciences, on Ellicott Street in Buffalo.

The workshop exposes local high school students to ever-evolving developments in science and fans their interest in the field.

"The hope is that students who already have an interest in science will get involved in a particular field," said Jeffrey Delmerico, a research apprentice at Roswell Park Cancer Institute.

Friday morning at nearby Roswell Park Cancer Institute, the students learned how computing technology is used in medical research, particularly in radiation medicine. They focused on everything from the fundamentals of physics to storing medical records.

"It's good exposure" said Matt Jones, a staff scientist with UB's Center for Computational Science. "They see a whole spectrum of activities."

Dr. Daryl Nazareth, a medical physicist at Roswell Park, agreed.



“They learn how new computer technology can be used to effectively treat a cancer patient,” he said. “Students come here to learn about new techniques and how they can be applied to computing technology.”

The students were riveted to computer screens as calculations and graphs appeared before them.

“It’s amazing the things that they can do with computers,” said Alyssa Bartels, a student at North Collins High School. “It’s a lot to take in.”

Many of the students agreed that their interest in science was enhanced by having the opportunity to use and see the latest technology firsthand.

“We’ve gained a better insight,” said Lavanya Rao, a junior at Williamsville East High School. “It’s hands-on experience.”

The high school participants also came from City Honors, Canisius, Orchard Park, Clarence, Buffalo Seminary, Nichols and Nardin Academy.

jcarswell@buffnews.com