

SOUTHWESTERN NEWS

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HIGH-SCHOOL STUDENT PUBLISHED IN MEDICAL JOURNAL SHOWS PROMISE AS RISING STAR

DALLAS – March 29, 2001 – When high-school senior Pamela Gant signed up for a summer of research work at UT Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas, she never expected to end the summer as a published researcher.

But with publication of her letter to the editor titled “Shared Delusion in Mother and Son” in the February issue of *Annals of Emergency Medicine*, that’s just where Gant, 17, finds herself.

Although journal editors do not track author age, she may be the youngest author ever published in the journal.

A senior at Dallas’ Seagoville High School, Gant was a 2000 participant in the summer research program for high school students administered through the Science Teacher Access to Resources at Southwestern (STARS) program. The STARS program was begun by UT Southwestern faculty members in 1991 to improve the quality of secondary-school science education in Texas.

Working with Dr. Sherwood Brown, assistant professor of psychiatry, Gant followed medical students, worked in clinics and shadowed doctors working in Parkland Memorial Hospital’s psychiatric emergency room.

“I was accepted as a part of the team,” Gant said. “No one treated me like a high-school student. They just took me in and taught me everything. I learned more in one summer than I thought was possible.”

After one particularly unusual case in the ER, Gant’s mentor, Brown, suggested she write about the patient, a 45-year-old suicidal woman who voluntarily came to the emergency room with her 17-year-old son, who also was suicidal. The mother and son believed they were being “programmed” as part of a conspiracy involving their church and government agencies.

“At first, writing about the case was overwhelming. I didn’t know where to start,” she said. “Then I wrote it in layman’s terms, and Dr. Brown helped me translate it into scientific language.”

In the letter, Gant outlined the case, an example of the rare shared psychotic disorder, also known as folie à deux, in which an individual with mental illness has a delusion similar to that of another person with an established psychosis. The letter was accepted for publication in

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the journal, with Gant as primary author.

“Pamela wrote the letter,” Brown said. “She really took it from scratch. It’s unusual to have the opportunity to work with a high-school student on the preparation of a report that will be published in a peer-reviewed journal.”

Of course, Gant is not your average 17-year-old. Not only is she a published author and ranked first in her high-school class, but she also plans a career in nursing or medicine after high school and hopes to be an overseas missionary.

“Pamela is sincere in an insincere world,” Brown said. “She’s enthusiastic and made a really good impression. After she went back to school last fall, people asked about her. We missed her.”

Jeannie Han, education coordinator for STARS, said Gant’s publication may be a first for the STARS program and is a sign that the program is serving a purpose.

“The goal of the STARS high school summer research program is to expose students to science,” she said. “We want faculty and students to work closely and learn from each other.”

STARS is funded by the state of Texas and from private and corporate donations. Since its inception, STARS has grown considerably. With 20 different, active programs, STARS has served more than 4,000 teachers, 20,000 students and almost 1,000 schools in North Texas.

Each summer North Texas science teachers and Dallas Independent School District students are paired with UT Southwestern researchers for a summer of hands-on biomedical research. The students and teachers, hand-selected through a rigorous application process each spring, are paid for the eight weeks of research. Teachers must create a classroom lesson plan from the work they have done. Students, too, complete projects to show the work they have accomplished.

In addition to these summer research opportunities, STARS reaches out to local schools and students. High-school classes can come to UT Southwestern for tours of research labs, affiliated hospitals or classrooms. STARS recruits science fair judges for local schools and began a distance learning program in 1999. Scientists on campus also volunteer to go to local schools and speak about topics relevant to the school’s curriculum.

For more information about STARS, please call 214-648-9505 or visit www.utsouthwestern.edu/stars.

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