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## BCM-led program promotes highschoolers' interest in genetics

HOUSTON -- (February 2, 2009) -- Advanced biology students at Bellaire High School in Houston will participate in a Baylor College of Medicine-hosted educational conference focusing on genetic disorders Feb. 5.

"This will expose youth to science and, in particular, genetics," said Dr. Fernando Scaglia, associate professor of molecular and human genetics at BCM, who will lead the program and serve as a mentor to the students. "There is an aspect of science and genetics that terrifies young people. We want to demystify that, dispel the threatening notion of science and potentially gear some of these students into scientific careers."

The event is sponsored by the The American Society of Human Genetics, the Genetics Society of America, the National Sciences Resources Center and the National Association of Biology Teachers as part of The Geneticist-Educator Network of Alliances Project, a science project designed to build a framework of long-term collaboration between educators and geneticists and a sustainable infrastructure to facilitate the meaningful outreach efforts by genetics faculty members in secondary education.

"This is a team effort, a national alliance of geneticists partnered with high school educators to educate and motivate interest in genetics in young students," said Scaglia. "Our participation fosters Baylor's commitment to excellence in education, in addition to research and patient care. We are very excited to be a part of this project."

Scaglia has joined efforts with Anna Loonam, an advanced placement biology teacher at Bellaire High School. As part of "Genetics Night," students from the advanced placement biology classes will participate in a poster session discussion on various genetic disorders, including Down syndrome, Turner syndrome, fragile x syndrome and MELAS syndrome. Divided into groups and assigned to different disorders, the students will educate their peers on each genetic disorder, the gene mutation or chromosomal abnormality involved, symptoms and research advances.

"Promoting this kind of education in young students is very important for the health community and benefits society," said Scaglia. "If we can capture these students at a young age, we can put them on the right path to successful scientific careers."

The event starts at 6:30 p.m. and will be held in the library at Bellaire High School, 5100 Maple St., Bellaire, TX 77401-4999. It is free and open to the public. Parking is available in the faculty lot.

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