



Top achiever targets cancer

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17 April 2007, A chemistry student is focusing his work on a vaccine for cancer, thanks to a Top Achiever Doctoral Scholarship.

Dong Jun (Danny) Lee, a PhD student at The University of Auckland, has received a Tertiary Education Commission scholarship to fund his research into cancer vaccine targeting.

Danny, under the supervision of Professor Margaret Brimble, is looking to develop glycopeptides, molecules made from sugars and amino acids, which could activate the immune system against melanoma. The synthesised glycopeptide molecules will be chemically bound to vaccine molecules and carry them to specific cells of the immune system, initiating an immune response in the body promoting recognition and killing of cancer cells.

Danny, a graduate of Auckland Grammar School, started a Bachelor of Science degree in 2003. After his second year, he spent time working with a researcher at the University and decided to specialise in medicinal chemistry. He undertook an Honours degree in 2006, and was invited to present his research at the international Universitas 21 Undergraduate Research Conference in Queensland.

"This scholarship will be fundamental in funding my glycopeptide research," says Danny. "Organic chemistry often involves using a whole range of skills to synthesise a known molecule from scratch. My research is an interaction between biology and chemistry and is more like an invention, where the end product might end up curing cancer."

The Top Achiever Doctoral Scholarships are funded by the government. Scholars each receive an annual stipend of \$25,000 for up to three years towards their PhD study, course fees and conference funding.

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