

UTRGV fulfills Ghana student researcher's dream

The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV) has always been a beacon of hope for students from diverse backgrounds, fostering talent and creating opportunities that change lives.

This is the inspiring story of Dennis Kwabiah, a determined UTRGV Master of Science in Biochemistry and Molecular Biology student from Kumasi, Ghana, Africa, whose journey to pursue cancer research at the School of Medicine was filled with obstacles, perseverance, and unwavering support from Dr. Manish Tripathi, assistant professor in immunology and microbiology at the UTRGV School of Medicine.

A Dream Deferred but Never Lost

Kwabiah had always been passionate about making a difference in cancer research. In 2021, he reached out to Dr. Tripathi, a distinguished researcher at UTRGV, expressing his keen interest in studying hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC), one of the most common and deadly forms of liver cancer. Despite his enthusiasm and strong academic credentials, Kwabiah faced multiple visa rejections that delayed his aspirations of studying in the United States.

However, Dr. Tripathi saw Kwabiah's immense potential and encouraged him throughout the setbacks. With moral support, guidance, and determination, Dennis remained resolute in his pursuit. His persistence paid off, and in January 2023, he finally joined the Master of Science in Biochemistry and Molecular Biology (MSBCMB) program at UTRGV.

Support Beyond Academics

Upon his arrival, Kwabiah's intelligence and commitment to research were evident. Recalling their first meeting over a meal at McDonald's in Trenton, Dr. Tripathi immediately recognized his drive and ambition. To support Kwabiah financially, he helped him secure a work-study position. When work-study funds were unavailable, Dr. Tripathi ensured that Kwabiah remained financially stable by supporting him through his research grants and funds.

Pioneering Research in Cancer Treatment

Under Dr. Tripathi's mentorship, Kwabiah embarked on research focusing on the role of YBX1 in sorafenib resistance in hepatocellular carcinoma.

Kwabiah played a crucial role in identifying transcription factors responsible for this resistance and was a member of a team comprising of UTRGV premed students and postdocs.

His dedication and contributions to this critical area of research have opened new avenues for further study. Because of Kwabiah, Dr. Tripathi's lab is now investigating potential small-molecule inhibitors targeting this transcription factor.

A Bright Future Ahead

On February 28th, Kwabiah successfully defended his MSBCMB thesis, marking a significant milestone in his academic journey. His hard work and perseverance have positioned him as a strong Ph.D. candidate, and he has since applied to prestigious institutions such as UTSW, Mayo Clinic, and Stanford, among other competitive programs.

UTRGV: A Hub for Student Success

Kwabiah's journey is a testament to UTRGV's commitment to student enrichment and training. Dr. Tripathi's unwavering support exemplifies the university's mission to nurture and empower students from diverse backgrounds, ensuring they receive the guidance and resources needed to excel in their fields.

UTRGV continues to be a catalyst for dreams, proving that students like Kwabiah can overcome challenges and make meaningful contributions to science and society with determination, mentorship, and institutional support.

Kwabiah's story is not just about one student's success—it's about the power of education, mentorship, and perseverance in transforming lives. His journey inspires students worldwide, proving that no dream is too big when backed by dedication and the right support system.







