

Learn while you're 'grossed out'

24 heures de science Students visit St. Mary's pathology lab

BY BRENDA BRANSWELL, THE GAZETTE MAY 8, 2010



Students work on a mannequin puzzle at St. Mary's Hospital during the fifth-annual 24 heures de science, an event aimed at bringing together researchers with the public and to promote careers in science among youth.

Photograph by: MARIE-FRANCE COALLIER, THE GAZETTE, The Gazette

The girl from James Lyng High School asked the question that was probably on every visitor's mind in the pathology lab at St. Mary's Hospital.

"What is it?" she asked, perplexed by the two brown objects the size of gumballs that Dr. Indrojit Roy put on display.

"This is a gallstone," Roy, the hospital's chief of pathology, told the high school students staring at the tray.

"It filled the entire gall bladder," said Roy, who explained the organ's important role in digestion.

The students' visit to the pathology lab is one of 150 activities organized across Quebec yesterday and today for the annual 24 heures de science event.

First launched in 2006, the event aims to bring together researchers and the general public, and to spark interest in science and technology. It also promotes careers in that field to students.

At noon hour yesterday, a few students in the lab at St. Mary's looked repulsed by the sight of healthy and diseased breast tissue and a colon with a tumour.

But the demonstration sure seemed to hold their attention. When Roy invited them to feel the difference between the rubbery quality of the healthy breast tissue and the rock-hard feel to the tumour, several students who were wearing blue medical examination gloves gamely leaned forward to do so.

"I found it really interesting. I learned things I never knew. It's pretty cool seeing real organs," said Matin Ahmed, 16, a Grade 9 student whose favourite subject is science.

Michaela Suchecki said she had to sit down at one point. "I found it interesting but I got a bit queasy when they took out the colon because I wasn't expecting it to look like that," said Michaela, 14, a Grade 9 student.

One quarter of the 24 heures de science activities are in schools. The event tries to create direct contact with researchers, said Jacques Kirouac, executive director of Science pour tous, the non-profit organizing group. "We try to be as close as possible to reality."

Michael Broomfield, who teaches science at James Lyng High School, said the Grade 9 curriculum contains lots of human biology but you can't bring a real heart or lung to school. "So this is really great," Broomfield said as another group of students gathered for the demonstration in the pathology lab.

Vishan Charamis, 13, a Grade 7 student at Lauren Hill Academy, snapped pictures for a class science project. While he was "grossed out" by the organs he saw - "I didn't think they'd look like that" - Vishan said he found the activity interesting.

"I'm going to think twice about what I'm going to eat because I really don't want gallstones," he said.

bbranswell@thegazette.canwest.com

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