

Richmond teen honoured for research, philanthropy

BY TODD COYNE, VANCOUVER SUN JUNE 6, 2010



Perri Tutelman, 16, was honoured as one of Canada's Top 20 Under 20 for her cancer research and foundation, Cures For Kids.

Photograph by: Ian Smith, PNG

While many teens her age are just starting their first summer jobs and learning to drive, Perri Tutelman is conducting pioneering work at the BC Cancer Research Centre, studying auto-immune disorders at a university biomedics lab and running a foundation to benefit the BC Children's Hospital.

It would be enough to keep a whole team of experienced PhDs and professionals busy, but at 16, Tutelman is still a year away from graduating from high school.

But that hasn't stopped the young Richmond resident from breaking new ground in cancer research and starting the Cures for Kids Foundation — work that has now landed her a coveted spot on Canada's Top 20 Under 20, a list of successful teens compiled by Youth in Motion.

While the list includes 19 other young stars in the fields of science, technology, business, medicine and philanthropy, Tutelman is one of only three under the age of 17.

When reached on her phone Sunday, Tutelman had just walked off a stage at BC Children's Hospital after handing over a cheque for \$8,000 from Cures for Kids to help the hospital pay for a new oncology procedure room.

Tutelman was in Toronto last week to meet with Canada's top banking executives and corporate CEOs as a part of a leadership seminar held in concert with the Top 20 Under 20 awards.

"We got to network and learn more about the corporate world and how we can use our passions to make a difference," said Tutelman.

She said she hopes to use the connections she made with other teenagers at the awards to further her ambitions in medical research.

"I'm sure I'm going to definitely collaborate with them on projects in the future because we all have that drive and that passion to achieve more."

Tutelman was just 14 when she began cancer research at the BC Cancer Centre — research that has since taken her and the field of cancer studies in interesting new directions.

"I used a natural herb called artemisinin currently being used in Third World countries for malaria treatment," she said, explaining she chose it for cancer research because its mechanism is only activated in areas of high iron concentration. She noted the malaria parasite is very high in iron because it's a blood parasite.

"And I thought that cancer too has a very high iron concentration because the cells are constantly uptaking blood because cancers are always growing."

At UBC's Biomedical Research Centre, Tutelman is studying the human immune system and its relation to cancer growth.

Wilfred Jefferies, a professor at UBC's Biomedical Research Centre, called the budding researcher "truly exceptional for her age" and a "wonderful example for other young students."

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