

Understanding social competencies in pediatric brain tumour survivors.
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Research project – ADOS project:

During this second summer stage, I had the opportunity to work on different projects involving brain tumour survivors, but my principal focus was on the “ADOS project”. The project is still ongoing since there is a phase 2 that extends 6 months after phase 1 with an anticipation of a total of two years for study completion. The aim of this study is to evaluate and understand the relationship between cognitive functioning, emotion recognition and social behaviours among pediatric brain tumour survivors compared to a control group of children who have not been diagnosed with a brain tumour. For the first time, PBTSS' social behaviours will be objectively assessed relative to healthy controls using the ADOS-2, with the goal of improving understanding of the nature of their social competence difficulties. The findings of this project will certainly contribute to the advancement of knowledge in the field of social skills in pediatric brain tumour survivors, allowing for the development of a refined intervention that addresses the specific challenges of social behaviour in PBTSS. My main responsibilities were to get in contact with eligible PBTSSs, follow them throughout the length of the project, search for places (libraries, sports centers, summer camps, etc.) to recruit control participants and do some in-person recruitment. Understanding the potential effects of brain tumours on social competencies is a research area that still needs to produce some discoveries and evidence to improve clinical support for patients both during and after treatment. More research should be done in this area to address different psychosocial factors such as social support, work environment, social status, and any other social disparities (gender, race, age, socioeconomic status, etc.) which could affect brain tumour survivors later on in life. I look forward to pursuing this line of inquiry throughout my career.

The impact of the award on my personal life:

Being granted this studentship award was a great opportunity for me to explore a healthcare field I haven't been familiar with before: psychology. I discovered how the mental and social aspect of a patient is very important to consider in the recovery process from a brain tumor diagnosis. More specifically, I was able to learn from the combination of two fields, psychology and oncology, through research on brain tumours in a young population. With my ambitions to become a medical doctor, I had always been fascinated by oncology as a specialty. This award enabled me to explore one this field through research on pediatric brain tumour survivors. I plan to learn more about oncology during my journey in medical school, hopefully starting next fall if admitted. It also enabled me to enrich my CV with valuable experiences, which was invaluable to my application to medical school. These two summers on internship helped me to develop skills such as communication and organizational skills, empathy for patients, teamwork within a research team, and leadership in some group tasks, which are certainly going to help in my future career as a medical doctor.

Competition and conference:

During my internship, I had the opportunity to participate in an undergraduate student research competition organized by the Brain tumour foundation of Canada. Representing McGill university with two other students, we presented ‘Our Wishes’, which is a tool that we created

with the aim of improving quality of life (QOL), decreasing distress, and having positive impacts on the grieving process among families and patients in end of life (EOL). For my first truly research competition, we were awarded first place and received \$1,000. This meant a lot to me, and it was made possible by the award from BTFC. From my summer internship work, I submitted an abstract to the International Psycho-Oncology Society, which was accepted, titled "Exploring the association between social problems and withdrawal in a pediatric brain tumour survivor population with the use of two social measures (1st Autor)." I attended my first international conference and learned a lot about various psycho-oncology topics including brain tumours. It also provided me with the opportunity to network with students, researchers, and professionals from various healthcare disciplines. Additionally, I presented my findings to the Sainte-Justine research institute at the annual student research day. This helped me practice my communication skills in front of an audience and how to approach and answer questions asked by judges or people in the audience.

Thank you:

I wish to sincerely thank the Brain Tumor Foundation of Canada for their support of me during my learning journey. I look forward to contributing to the field of oncology and will forever be grateful to the BTFC for allowing me the foundational knowledge I gained through this summer internship program.