

Ode to a fibrin polymer -- How a student's verse made the clinical chemistry journal

September 9 2010, By Marcia Goodrich

(PhysOrg.com) -- Some things are more fun to learn than others, and the coagulation cascade has traditionally been ranked among the less fun. Sure, it's important--without it we'd all bleed to death--but it is devilishly complex, with a vocabulary only a clinical lab scientist could love.

Thus, Karyn Fay doesn't test her students on it, for fear it will be quickly memorized and even more quickly forgotten. "I have them repeat it to me," says the biological sciences professor of practice. "If they can put it down somehow, they learn it a lot better."

Most students develop a poster or a PowerPoint presentation for their mini-reports on how blood clots. Mark Vande Haar opted for poetry, but not just any kind of poetry.

"He decided to do a limerick," says Fay.

But not just any kind of limerick. Vande Haar penned a 12-verse epic in which he manages to rhyme words like "phospholipids," "[hemorrhage](#)" and "zymogen."

He explains. "The coagulation cascade has to do with [hematology](#). One part of it looks at the [blood cells](#), another looks at coagulation, the proteins in the blood that cause clotting. The proteins interact in special ways, and that's what inspired these limericks."

To wit:

*If you're dying from a traumatic hemorrhage,
your body can make its own bandage.
Factor III is released,
and calcium completes
the VIIa and TF assemblage.*

Also:

*Factor VIII and von Willebrand's factor stick,
and with platelets they help "make blood thick."
This starts the plug
and it makes me quite smug
to know I won't die from this prick.*

There's plenty more where that came from, and you'll be happy to know that you can read it right now in the [journal of the American Association for Clinical Chemistry](#).

"It was so innovative and so creative that we decided to send it to The Clinical Chemistry Journal," Fay said. "It has a section on using the other side of your brain called 'Unveiling the Right Side.' We submitted it, and they emailed me in a week and said they wanted to publish it."

Publication in a peer-reviewed journal is an illustrious cap to an undergraduate career, particularly since Vande Haar took a road less traveled. After six years at Michigan Tech, he is now on the dean's list and on the verge of graduating. "I finally found what I love to do," he says of his major in clinical laboratory science.

Initially, he had studied computer science, in part because his physician father bent over backward to avoid influencing his son's career choice. "But when I tried biology, I loved it, and on the way to premed, I found medical technology. I'd like to be a pathologist."

Vande Haar is completing an internship at the Mayo Clinic and hopes to get into med school. But if he doesn't, he still has plenty of options. "The CLS degree gives you everything you need to get into med school, plus there are so many other avenues," he says. "And Alice [Soldan, senior lecturer] and Karyn are great instructors. I don't think there are two better instructors on the planet."

For her part, Fay calls Vande Haar's coagulation cascade descriptions "phenomenal," both for their accuracy and their inventiveness. "He said he did it over a weekend, that it just came to him," she says in amazement.

The limericks are not Vande Haar's first effort. "My uncle and I used to write poems back and forth during the holiday season," he says. "When Karyn said we could do the coagulation cascade in any format, I thought I'd write a poem. My uncle was recently diagnosed with prostate cancer and hasn't been strong enough to write poetry, so I thought I'd try to cheer him up."

Plus, Vande Haar says, he just loves to write. "You have to love to write if you are a physician."

Provided by Michigan Technological University

Citation: Ode to a fibrin polymer -- How a student's verse made the clinical chemistry journal (2010, September 9) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2010-09-ode-fibrin-polymer-student.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.