

# Young scientists bound for US

They will represent Singapore at the world's largest annual science competition in Nevada

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By Leow Si Wan

Fancy inhaling the gas produced by a nest of maggots instead of taking an antibiotic to fight off a bacterial infection?

Three students from Hwa Chong Institution believe the idea can be developed – and have picked up a gold award for it at this year's Singapore Science and Engineering Fair (SSEF).

They will represent Singapore at the world's largest annual pre-college science competition, the Intel International Science and Engineering Fair, to be held in Nevada, in the United States, next month.

There, more than 1,500 high-school students from 50 countries will showcase their research.

Students from NUS High School of Mathematics and Science and National Junior College (NJC) – also gold –award winners at SSEF – will take part in the competition too.

The Hwa Chong team explained that although it is widely known that some hospital get maggots to eat away dead or infected body tissue to promote wound healing, little is known about the anti-bacterial activities of these insect larvae.

The team found that the flatulence and body fluids of maggots can kill certain bacteria, so it is now working on extracting these gases and putting them into an inhalant so bacteria-infected lungs can be targeted.

NUS High School's Nicholas Chen, 18, also Nevada-bound, will present his research on a quicker method to observe micromagnetic patterns, while NJC's Roderica Ng, 18, will explain her idea for bio-artificial kidneys, a stop-gap answer to those awaiting kidney transplants.

Nicholas and Roderica picked up additional honours yesterday – the top prize and a merit prize respectively, at the A\*Star Talent Search (ATS) 2009, which is open to selected SSEF winners.

The 149 winners of SSEF and ATS were presented with their awards at a ceremony held at the Biopolis yesterday.

Mr Heng Chee How, Minister of State in the Prime Minister's Office, addressed the students at the award presentation and urged them to use their talent to benefit mankind.

Sir Tim Hunt, the chief judge at ATS this year, said that besides an inquiring spirit and a willingness to challenge the given order, budding scientists need “that little bit of a naughty trait, an ability to rebel and this drive to want to get to the bottom of things”.