Doggone it: Downside to building’s demise

In this mid-1970s aerial view of the DMS campus, Strasenburgh Hall—originally built as a dormitory—is the low building on the far right.

For student, pathology project soothes loss

When Alissa Waite’s father bumped his head on a ski lift in March 2005, he was diagnosed with a minor concussion. But about a week later, he passed out while skiing. A CT scan at the hospital revealed that his intracranial pressure was dangerously high. Rushed into surgery to relieve the pressure, he soon learned what was causing his symptoms—three brain tumors called glioblastomas. Patients with glioblastoma multiforme (GBM) usually live between 12 and 15 months. Waite’s father died in February 2006, less than a year after his diagnosis.

Today, Waite, a second-year Dartmouth medical student, is able to talk comfortably about her father’s death and the cancer that killed him, in part because of a research project she’s been working on with Dr. Brent Harris, a DHMC neuropathologist. The project, supported by the Andy Fund, involves looking at the correlation between various characteristics of GBM cells and a patient’s prognosis. Harris and his collaborators—Drs. Camilo Fadul, a neuro-oncologist, and Gregory Tsongalis, a molecular pathologist—are interested in an enzyme that makes some chemotherapy drugs less effective.

Benefit: Throughout her father’s illness, Waite says, she often felt “helpless.” So when the opportunity arose to conduct research that might benefit future GBM patients, “I needed to jump on that,” she says.

Waite spent last summer reviewing clinical histories and tracking down more than 100 tumor samples from GBM patients who had been treated at DHMC in the past five years. The samples will be used to create a tissue microarray—a small wax block...
Playing around with proteomics

There's a new kid on the block over at Dartmouth's Norris Cotton Cancer Center, and he's willing to share his high-tech "toys." Dr. Scott Gerber, a proteomics expert who until recently was at Harvard, has a couple of state-of-the-art mass spectrometers. "We'll use a few of those toys," Gerber explains. "Then the block will be here as a resource" for other scientists who wish to collaborate with Harris's group or to conduct their own analyses.

Harris's GBM project is having another, rather unexpected benefit—not for other scientists but for Waite. "We'll use a few of those slides—a few slices off the top of the block," Waite says, "then the block will be here as a resource" for other scientists who wish to collaborate with Harris's group or to conduct their own analyses.

Harris's GBM project is having another, rather unexpected benefit—not for other scientists but for Waite. Working on the GBM research has been "very therapeutic for me," says Waite, "to feel like I'm doing something to maybe make [things] different for the next family" facing a GBM diagnosis. "It's great to get to know the faculty at the hospital a little bit better," she adds, "and to see how the hospital works." Harris invited Waite to shadow him so she could get a sense of what a neuropathologist does, and he's helping her stay involved with the research project, even as she manages a full class load.

"Medicine gives you an opportunity to [do] that," she says.

Jennifer Durgin