

BELIZEAN Stories



Dr. Aimee Flores is a Stem Cell and Cancer Biology Scientist with over eight years of research experience resulting in several top tier scientific journal publications, the development of a novel metabolic activity assay and a patent for a compound that promotes hair growth.

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Aimee was born and raised in Belize. As a child she attended Holy Redeemer Primary School where she was a regular at the Leo Bradley Library reading competitions and the National Spelling Bee. Though she didn't win every competition, Aimee was always encouraged by her parents to strive for excellence, be brave and try her best. As the only child of Misael and Ester Flores, Aimee was taught not only the value of learning, but the importance of family, community, friendship and play. She started volunteering from a young age at the Dorothy Menzies Child Care Center and Sister Cecilia Home for the Elderly and later joined the Rotaract Club of Belize during her time at Saint Catherine Academy.

Aimee attended Saint John's College Junior College before leaving Belize in August of 2008 to pursue her dream of becoming a scientist. While she left home with a heavy heart, she was determined. Fascinated by the potential of stem cells and regenerative medicine, Aimee enrolled at the University of Southern California where she would be at the forefront of biomedical discovery. During her time as an undergraduate, Aimee conducted research in the laboratory of Dr. Martin Pera, a pioneer in stem cell research. There she gained invaluable experience in the derivation and characterization of pluripotent stem cells. Pluripotent stem cells can produce any cell or tissue in the body and hold great therapeutic potential.

After graduating with her Bachelor of Science in Biological Sciences with honors from the Phi Sigma Theta National Honor Society, Aimee went on to obtain her Master of Science in Molecular and Experimental Pathology. During her time as a graduate researcher, Aimee explored the role of stem cells in limb regeneration and presented her work at numerous seminars and conferences across the scientific community. She graduated with distinction as Student of the Year for the Department of Pathology at Keck School of Medicine at the University of Southern California.

Aimee was recruited into the Molecular Biology Interdepartmental Doctoral Program at the University of California Los Angeles in summer of 2013. During her time at

UCLA, her research has been focused on the regenerative capacity of the skin and hair and investigating the role of metabolism in squamous cell carcinoma. She has received numerous awards including the Broad Stem Cell Center Pre-Doctoral Fellowship Award, the Whitcome Pre-Doctoral Fellowship Award, the UCLA Dissertation Year Fellowship Award and the Molecular Biology Institute Jules Brenner Fellowship Award. She continues to present her work at seminars and conferences across the scientific community and has published in several top tier scientific journals including Nature. She was most recently recognized for her discovery of a small molecule that activates the stem cells in the hair follicle to make hair grow. Her groundbreaking research has the potential to lead to the development of new drugs that could promote hair growth for people with baldness or alopecia, which is hair loss associated with such factors as hormonal imbalance, stress, ageing or chemotherapy treatment. Aimee earned her Doctor of Philosophy in Molecular Biology from the University of California Los Angeles in May of this year.

In addition to her academic achievements, as a Scientific Consultant at the Business of Science Center and member of the Advancing Women in Science and Engineering Group at UCLA, Aimee mentors the professional growth of researchers and young women in evaluating the commercial potential of emerging technologies from laboratory to market and encourages graduates who enter



the professional sector to value diversity and its impact on innovation to ultimately break down existing gender barriers. With the assistance of the US Embassy in Belize, Aimee serves as an Ambassador for Young Women in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) and has visited with local high school students to share her experiences as a scientist with the hope of motivating and encouraging our young Belizeans to consider careers in STEM. She was also the Keynote Speaker at this year's 20,000 Strong Women's Empowerment Rally where she encouraged young Belizeans to be brave, resolute in their pursuit of excellence and relentless in their press for progress. The bi-annual Women's Empowerment Rally is held by the office of the Special Envoy for Women and Children in collaboration with the National Women's Commission, the Women's Department and the Ministry of Human Development, Social Transformation and Poverty Alleviation Belize.

Aimee continues to conduct research at the University of California Los Angeles. She is currently conducting pharmacokinetic/pharmacodynamic, safety and toxicology studies on her small molecule for hair growth as she moves closer to clinical trial testing and drug commercialization. She continues to work on developing metabolic inhibitors to squamous cell carcinoma, and while she is still living in the United States, she plans to continue her outreach and advocacy for young women in STEM in Belize. Aimee is committed to giving back and hopes that one day soon she will be able to assist in introducing our young Belizean students to scientific research and discovery from her very own laboratory - at home in her beloved Belize.