

Business

Rowan students help make drug production greener

College partners with Bristol-Myers

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MAYS LANDING — A local Rowan University junior is helping a major pharmaceutical company make the manufacturing process for its new cancer-fighting drug more environmentally friendly.

Thor Farnsworth, 21, is among a team of eight Rowan chemical engineering students and faculty members working with New Brunswick-based Bristol-Myers Squibb Pharmaceutical Research on its "green engineering" design.

The term indicates the move to develop products in a way that does not harm the environment or employees while keeping costs reasonable.

For example, the team is looking at ways to replace solvents in the process with materials that are better for the environment, Farnsworth said.

"Sometimes it takes 300 kilograms of solvent to make one kilogram of product," Farnsworth said.

The team also looks at the effects on the pharmaceutical company workers, he said. The members look at health risks to employees, such as ensuring that while trying to

help manufacture a product that fights cancer, they themselves are not exposed to carcinogens, he said.

Although the students could have worked with existing drugs, they instead are working on a cancer drug that is in clinical trials and is being made on a pilot scale, according to Stewart Slater, a chemical engineering professor who is one of the project's supervisors. The drug could eventually be used in high volumes.

"To make our work more real-world, Bristol-Myers Squibb said we could be involved in a current project," Slater said in a prepared statement. "We're actually meeting

and working with the real team that's developing this drug."

A two-year, \$26,813 grant awarded by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in October is funding the partnership between Rowan and Bristol-Myers Squibb.

Farnsworth also is involved in the military and will be a commissioned officer when he graduates, he said.

But he eventually plans on attending medical school in New York.

"A lot of people in my family are in medicine," Farnsworth said. "It's always been one of my passions."