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Research is essential for the discovery of novel ideas about the world we live in. We research to identify new problems, develop new technology, and better understand our world and beyond. This summer I had the incredible opportunity to engage in life-changing research with Dr. Laura Vandenberg through the virtual summer program at the University of Massachusetts. Experiences like this are hard to come by for young people who wish to gain a deeper understanding of the field of breast cancer prevention and its environmental links. Hence, I was thrilled when Laura and Lisa at the Great Neck Breast Cancer Coalition informed us that our research internships would be continuing via online instruction during the Coronavirus pandemic.

When I met Dr. Vandenberg and my fellow researchers, I immediately realized how fortunate I was to be able to be a part of the GNBCC research program. Zoom classes with Dr. Vandenberg quickly became my favorite part of each day as I absorbed each new piece of information she taught us about different harmful environmental toxins and risk communication. I was alarmed to learn that people are exposed to numerous unregulated hormone-disrupting chemicals every day; one example is Bisphenol S, a chemical found in the linings of canned foods and drinks. Despite having many adverse health effects, Bisphenol S is marketed as a safer alternative to Bisphenol A. I found myself sharing what I learned each day at the dinner table

with my family and wanting to communicate the risks of harmful chemicals to a greater audience.

During my four-week internship, I researched propylparaben, a preservative used in cosmetic products that are applied to the skin and can accumulate in body tissues. Studies show that parabens can disrupt hormones from functioning properly, and exposure to propylparaben may contribute to increased risk for breast tumors in women; early puberty in girls; and decreased sperm quality in boys. With the guidance of Dr. Vandenberg, my classmates, and undergraduate researcher students, I created both an infographic and video to inform the public about this harmful chemical that a large portion of the population is exposed to via cosmetic products throughout their lifetime.

I am extremely grateful to the Great Neck Breast Cancer Coalition research program for providing me with the opportunity to participate in research that will impact the lives of thousands of women affected by breast cancer. The gripping experiences I have gained this summer will resonate with me forever, and I will do my best to continue sharing the knowledge I have acquired with the people in my community. Thank you, GNBCC, for opening the door to endless research possibilities. I hope to learn more about environmental links to breast cancer and breast cancer prevention in the future.