



For Immediate Release

Stem Cell Network to receive \$5.3 million in annual research funding

*Cutting-edge projects include CARE-NET led by Dr. Jacques Galipeau
of Lady Davis Institute for Medical Research*

MONTREAL, March 31, 2005 – The Honourable Irwin Cotler, Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, today renewed the federal government’s commitment to the promise and potential of stem cell research by announcing \$5.3 million in annual funding for the Stem Cell Network, one of Canada’s Networks of Centres of Excellence.

Research funding will support a range of high-impact, large-scale national projects, including CARE-NET, a multi-centre effort led by Dr. Jacques Galipeau of the Sir Mortimer B. Davis - Jewish General Hospital to study the use of adult stem cells as repair material for damaged hearts, lungs and blood vessels.

“Canadians are leaders in stem cell science, having made many of the most significant discoveries in the field,” said Minister Cotler. “Network researchers are living up to this reputation by working towards the development of novel therapies for some of society’s most devastating diseases.”

This funding is part of a national announcement of up to \$55.05 million to extend the research activities of four Networks in the areas of child development and literacy, water quality, health, and the automotive industry.

“We are extremely pleased that the federal government recognizes the value and impact of the remarkable work coming out of Canada’s stem cell research laboratories,” said Dr. Ron Worton, Scientific Director of the Stem Cell Network, which includes more than 70 researchers from universities and hospitals across Canada.

CARE-NET, for example, brings together top scientists from Montreal, Toronto, Vancouver and Ottawa. Researchers hope to push scientific discovery towards clinical trials within the next two to five years by uncovering ways to grow a patient’s own cells in the laboratory and to use those cells as patches to repair damaged hearts and lungs.

“We have assembled an amazing team to probe the therapeutic potential of stem cells in treating cardiovascular and respiratory disease,” says Dr. Galipeau, a research leader in the Stem Cell Network. The CARE-NET project will rely on a state-of-the-art cell-handling facility at the hospital’s Lady Davis Institute for Medical Research to support future clinical trials.

The project is co-funded by the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada and the Canadian Institutes of Health Research. “This exciting new work will define which of the body’s stem cells can be used to rebuild heart and vascular tissue,” says Dr. Robert Côté of the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada’s Research Policy and Planning Advisory Committee.

“This is truly a new frontier in research,” said Dr. Eric Marcotte, Team Lead, Regenerative Medicine, of the Canadian Institutes of Health Research. “CARE-NET is part of a world-wide recognition of the promise of regenerative medicine to use adult stem cells to repair and regenerate critical organ function in heart and lung disease and to ultimately cure the disease.”

***The Stem Cell Network**, established in 2001, brings together more than 70 leading scientists, clinicians, engineers, and ethicists from universities and hospitals across Canada with a mandate to investigate the immense therapeutic potential of stem cells for the treatment of diseases currently incurable by conventional approaches. Headquartered at the University of Ottawa, the Stem Cell Network is one of Canada’s Networks of Centres of Excellence funded through Industry Canada and its three granting councils. (www.stemcellnetwork.ca)*

***The Jewish General Hospital’s Lady Davis Institute for Medical Research (LDI)**, founded in 1969, has become a world leader in numerous fields of medical investigation, including cancer, AIDS, cardiovascular disease, aging, genetics, emergency medicine, nephrology, epidemiology and the psychosocial aspects of illness. Since 1934, the **Sir Mortimer B. Davis - Jewish General Hospital**, a McGill University teaching hospital, has provided “Care for All,” serving patients from diverse religious, linguistic and cultural backgrounds in Montreal, throughout Quebec and beyond. As one of the province’s largest acute-care hospitals, the JGH has achieved a reputation for excellence in key medical specialties by continually expanding and upgrading its facilities for clinical treatment and teaching, as well as research at the Lady Davis Institute for Medical Research. For more, please visit www.jgh.ca.*

***The Canadian Institutes of Health Research** is the Government of Canada's agency for health research. Its objective is to excel, according to internationally accepted standards of scientific excellence, in the creation of new knowledge and its translation into improved health for Canadians, more effective health services and products and a strengthened Canadian health care system. Composed of 13 Institutes, CIHR provides leadership and support to more than 9,000 researchers and research teams in every province of Canada. www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca*

***Networks of Centres of Excellence** are unique partnerships among universities, industry, government and not-for-profit organizations aimed at turning Canadian research and entrepreneurial talent into economic and social benefits for all Canadians. The NCE program is managed jointly by the three federal granting agencies— Science and Engineering Research Canada, the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, and the Social Sciences and Humanities*

Research Council—in partnership with Industry Canada. For more information, please visit www.nce.gc.ca

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BACKGROUNDER

Stem Cell Network

The Stem Cell Network is a not-for-profit corporation, established in 2001, that brings together more than 70 leading scientists, clinicians, bio-engineers, and ethicists, with the mandate to investigate the immense therapeutic potential of stem cells for the treatment of diseases currently incurable by conventional approaches. Headquartered at the University of Ottawa, the Stem Cell Network will receive up to \$5.3 million annually. For more information, please visit: www.stemcellnetwork.ca

Scientific activities

- Network researchers have been actively exploring and characterizing novel stem cells, and progenitor cells, that may have therapeutic prospects.
- Six disease areas where Canada can have an impact have been identified and are being supported by the network. They are Parkinson's disease, stroke, diabetes, visual impairment, myocardial and skeletal muscle regeneration and Haemophilia A. In addition, Network researchers have isolated previously uncharacterized stem cell populations from various adult tissues.
- The Network has developed the only coordinated project worldwide to address questions concerning the extent and mechanisms of "plasticity" or the ability of cells to switch function.
- The Network's Stem Cell Genomics Project aims to generate a portfolio of genes and proteins present in and on different types of stem cells and mature cells. This information will be useful to scientists as they better understand why stem cells grow, die or differentiate in the manner that they do.

Ethics and outreach

The Network is actively involved in stem cell research ethics. Network research leader, Dr. Bartha Maria Knoppers of the Université de Montréal, chairs the International Stem Cell Forum's working group on policy and ethics. The Forum includes representatives of 15 leading industrialized nations. The network has created the world's only comprehensive database of regulatory information from other countries to help share information about legislation around the world related to stem cells. (www.stemgen.org).



Backgrounder: Clinical trial to begin at Jewish General Hospital

Starting later this spring, Dr. Jacques Galipeau of the Sir Mortimer B. Davis – Jewish General Hospital will join CARE-NET co-investigator Dr. Duncan Stewart of St. Michael's Hospital, Director of the Cardiology Division and the McLaughlin Regenerative Medicine Program at the University of Toronto, in the world's first-ever human trial to establish the safety of cell-based regenerative therapy for individuals with pulmonary arterial hypertension, a fatal lung disease.

Pioneered by scientists at Toronto and Montreal-based biotech Northern Therapeutics Inc., the Sir Mortimer B Davis - Jewish General Hospital will become the second site in a Canadian clinical trial recently approved by Health Canada.

“Our preclinical research indicates that transplanting genetically engineered stem-like precursor cells into the lungs can reverse established pulmonary hypertension by regenerating small blood vessels,” Dr. Stewart says.

Patients in the late stages of disease, who are awaiting lifesaving transplants, will take part in the trial, one of the earliest attempts to combine stem cells and gene therapy to treat disease.

“Our current drug therapies have brought great benefit to patients suffering from this disease, but we need new and original approaches for this incurable disorder. This new cellular therapy offers such a promise,” says Dr. David Langleben, an international expert on pulmonary arterial hypertension and co-investigator on the clinical study at the Jewish General Hospital.

Dr. Galipeau says the new clinical trial, set to start in June or July, is only possible “because of the role of the Stem Cell Network in bringing together scientists across Canada to collaborate on high impact research.”

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