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We are pleased to introduce the inaugural Network Newsletter. This quarterly newsletter is our chance to share with you the many Network activities and opportunities available that enable AllerGen investigators to move forward with their research, training and knowledge and technology exchange and exploitation activities. These initiatives facilitate the achievement of our ultimate goal of reducing the impact of allergic and related immune diseases nationally and globally.

Since its establishment in 2005, AllerGen has been building national multi-disciplined research capacity, successfully integrating its original five research themes into three integrated programmes of inquiry. We thank the research programme leaders and investigators who have dedicated so much of their time and effort to ensuring the long-term success of AllerGen, and look forward to strengthening the spirit of co-operation across the Network as we further integrate research across programmes and disciplines.

## **New Network appointments**

We would like to welcome Dr. Chris Mody, Professor and Chief, Division of Pulmonary Medicine, at the University of Calgary, as chair of AllerGen's Advanced Education and Training Opportunities Advisory Committee (AETOAC). Dr. Mody, who took this position in February 2008, has been involved in the creation of new fellowship opportunities and led an AETOAC Strategic Planning Retreat May 29-30, 2008, in Toronto.

We would also like to welcome Dr. Jeff Brook, Senior Scientist, Air Quality Research Branch, Environment Canada, as co-leader of Programme A: Gene-Environment Interactions. Dr. Brook has played a key role in pulling together national and international experts to speak to issues surrounding environmental exposure assessments, an integral aspect of data collection in the Canadian Healthy Infant Longitudinal Development (CHILD) study.

A special thank you to Dr. Malcolm Sears for dedicating his time and expertise for the past three years as co-leader of Programme A: Gene-Environment Interactions. Moving forward, Dr. Sears will be focusing his time and energy on the CHILD study.

## **CHILD Study updates**

On May 5, 2008, CHILD Study investigators, support staff and partners gathered in Vancouver for the internal launch of the study. The group celebrated their successes to date and discussed next steps with respect to implementation. A public launch of the CHILD Study was held on June 6, 2008, at McMaster University in Hamilton. Mike Wallace, Member of Parliament for Burlington, represented Minister of Health Tony Clement, to announce the \$12 million in joint funding provided by AllerGen and the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR). Dr. Peter Liu, scientific director at CIHR's Institute of Circulatory and Respiratory Health, Dr. Diana Royce, Managing Director and COO at AllerGen, Dr. John Kelton, Dean and Vice-President, Faculty of Health Sciences at McMaster University, CHILD study Director Dr. Sears and asthma patient Joanne Silver spoke at the launch, which resulted in extensive local and national media coverage.

The CHILD Study began recruiting mothers and infants on May 1, 2008 at four regional recruitment sites. Currently, 15 hospitals and universities are recruiting and doing follow-up with study subjects in Vancouver, Edmonton, Winnipeg and Toronto. The CHILD Administrative Centre is located at St. Joseph's Hospital in Hamilton, Ontario.

Director of the CHILD Study, Dr. Sears, will be supported in his leadership of the study by Deputy Director and Toronto Site Leader Dr. Padmaja Subbarao (The Hospital for Sick Children); Winnipeg Site Leader Dr. Allan Becker (University of Manitoba); Edmonton Site Leader Dr. Piush Mandhane (University of Alberta); and Vancouver Site Leader Dr. Stuart Turvey (University of British Columbia).

Dr. Subbarao and AllerGen's Board Chair Graham Scott met with federal Health Minister Tony Clement at his Toronto office in April 2008 to discuss the importance of the CHILD Study and its potential to impact health outcomes associated with allergic disease, as well as the processes for requesting additional federal support for this groundbreaking initiative. A recently released report, *Reaching for the Top: A Report by the Advisor on Healthy Children and Youth* by Dr. Kellie Leitch and commissioned by the federal government, points to the importance of a longitudinal study to examine the role of environmental exposure in the development of childhood disease. (See <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hl-vs/pubs/child-enfant/advisor-conseillere/index-eng.php>)

### **New researchers adding expertise to the Network**

AllerGen's Board of Directors approved four new researchers joining the Network on Feb. 10, 2008. They are:

- Dr. Parameswaran Nair, an Associate Professor in Respiriology and a Tier 2 Canada Research Chair in Airway Inflammometry at McMaster University. Dr. Nair's research focuses on non-invasive measurement of airway inflammation in treating asthma and COPD.
- Dr. Mark Inman, an Associate Professor, Department of Medicine, Respiriology, at McMaster University. Dr. Inman's research examines mechanisms impacting airway dysfunction in asthma.
- Dr. Roma Sehmi, an Associate Professor, Department of Medicine, Respiriology, at McMaster University. Dr. Sehmi's research interests include examining the role of mature eosinophils and their progenitor cells in the development of asthmatic responses.
- Dr. Chun Seow, an Associate Professor, Department of Pathology and Laboratory Medicine, at the University of British Columbia. Dr. Seow's current research focuses on the mechanical function, ultrastructure and biochemistry of airway smooth muscle, in health and disease.

Please join me in welcoming them to the AllerGen research team. We look forward to benefiting from their contributions to Network research and knowledge and technology exchange and exploitation. This brings the number of new investigators joining the Network between funding cycles to 17.

### **In-year funding available**

Consistent with its goal to catalyze allergic and related immune disease research that leads to social and economic innovation, AllerGen provides an opportunity for current Network investigators to apply for in-year research funding.

Proposals can be submitted any time, up to and including January 14, 2009.

In-year funding is available for strategically important commercialization and knowledge translation initiatives, especially those resulting from AllerGen-supported research in the 2005-07 round of funding; programmatic and network-level research partnership development; and capacity-building initiatives. Seed funding for strategically important research initiatives aligned with AllerGen's mandate and with its programmatic research investments is also available. Each funding programme is briefly outlined below.

#### **Commercialization and Intellectual Property Protection and Exploitation (\$200,000 budget)**

In partnership with other research partners and host institutions, this fund supports IP protection and knowledge and technology exploitation activities, including copyright, patents, commercialization and licenses, related to AllerGen-funded projects or commercialization of new technologies relevant to the Network's mission and goals.

#### **Knowledge Translation (\$100,000 budget) Grants up to \$50,000 available**

This fund supports translation, transfer and exchange of AllerGen research results to target audiences. Knowledge translation is the exchange, synthesis and ethically sound application of researcher findings within a complex system of relationships, and targets all sectors of society and all activities from creation of knowledge to its application to yield positive health outcomes.

#### **Strategic Initiatives (\$318,000 budget) Grants up to \$50,000 available**

This fund supports research focusing on in year research that is strategically aligned with and builds upon existing programmatic research thrusts within the Network research program and/or pilots a new, strategically important research thrust, aligned with AllerGen's overall strategic research priorities. By seed funding new R&D initiatives, this programme also enables AllerGen to build capacity within existing teams or launch new strategically important teams enabling them to obtain follow-on funding from other research support sources.

Visit [http://www.allergen-nce.ca/Research/In-Year\\_Research\\_Funding\\_Programme.html](http://www.allergen-nce.ca/Research/In-Year_Research_Funding_Programme.html) to download application and budget forms.

## **Next call for Research Proposals 2009–2012**

The next call for full research proposals will be issued in January 2009. The Network's focus in this, its third call, will be to extend existing research investments within Network research programmes. These programmes include gene-environment interactions; CHILD Study; mechanisms and biomarkers; mind-body interactions; therapeutics and drug discovery; food allergy and anaphylaxis; work-related allergy and asthma; policy and knowledge translation research.

We encourage research team leaders and project principal investigators to begin planning fall research development workshops with their Programme Leaders over the summer months. The focus of these workshops is to further integrate and transform strategic initiatives into cross-cutting investigative thrusts across AllerGen's existing three programmes of research—Gene-Environment Interactions, Diagnostics and Therapeutics, and Public Health, Ethics, Policy and Society—targeting associated commercializable and knowledge translation opportunities leading to social and economic benefits for Canadians.

## **Professional development opportunities**

Under AllerGen's Highly Qualified Personnel programme, investigators and trainees have an opportunity to further develop their skills through several partnered fellowships and trainee awards, including:

- AllerGen/Canadian Thoracic Society/Canadian Lung Association Asthma Clinician-Scientist Research Fellowship (maximum \$57,500/year for two years);
- AllerGen/TOPIGEN Industrial Research and Development Fellowship (maximum \$47,000/year for two years); and
- Specialized Lab Equipment Training Opportunities Programme.

For detailed information about these fellowships and how to apply, go to [http://www.allergen-nce.ca/Highly\\_Qualified\\_Personnel/Funding\\_and\\_Training\\_Opportunities.html](http://www.allergen-nce.ca/Highly_Qualified_Personnel/Funding_and_Training_Opportunities.html).

## **New internship opportunities available**

AllerGen has formalized a partnership with MITACS, a British Columbia-based NCE focused on mathematics that is managing the new Industrial Research and Development Internship program. The partnership allows AllerGen to help populate the 1,200 available internships in the programme, known as ACCELERATE Canada. For more information about opportunities through ACCELERATE Canada, visit [www.acceleratecanada.ca](http://www.acceleratecanada.ca).

## **Recent awards granted**

- AllerGen/CAAIF/Merck Frosst International Clinician-Scientist and Post-Doctoral Research Fellowship (\$60,000 for one year): Dr. Eduardo Jose Campos Alberto, El Salvador, will be completing his fellowship at the University of Alberta
- AllerGen-partnered International Clinician-Scientist and Post-Doctoral Research Fellowship (\$30,000 AllerGen contribution for one year): Dr. Ilan Asher, Israel, will be completing his fellowship at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario

## **Mid-term review to be held October 23, 2008**

The Administrative Team has been hard at work, gathering the necessary information that AllerGen will need to launch a successful mid-term review. Currently, a first draft of the Mid-Term Report is being developed, with the final report due to the Networks of Centres of Excellence (NCE) Directorate in August 2008.

To ensure accuracy in the Mid-Term Review, please ensure that you have updated all relevant project information through AllerGen's website, [www.allergen-nce.ca](http://www.allergen-nce.ca). You can enter My Communities at the top of the Home Page by selecting Member Log-In. If you have any questions about the online statistical reporting, please contact Office Manager Samantha Simpkin at the Admin Centre, 905-525-9140 ext 26640.

We welcome any feedback arising from this newsletter. As well, if you have specific issues you would like us to address in future issues, please let us know. All comments or enquiries should be sent *via* email to [bezzins@mcmaster.ca](mailto:bezzins@mcmaster.ca).