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Last month AllerGen hosted its Fourth Annual Conference in Ottawa from February 15-17. The primary focus of AllerGen's fourth *Innovation from Cell to Society* conference was to identify future research opportunities and priorities in collaboration with partner organizations for the next funding period, 2009-2012. Since the NCE has renewed AllerGen's funding to 2012, the Network is inviting proposals for multidisciplinary, networked and partnered programmes of research that it can support towards the achievement of its goal of reducing the impact of allergic and related immune diseases nationally and globally.

This year's annual research conference diverged from the usual presentation format in order to provide Network investigators and trainees with ample opportunity for networking and interaction with Network research partner organizations. Among the 163 conference delegates were representatives from partner organizations such as Environment Canada, iCAPTURE, Asthma Society of Canada and the Canadian Allergy and Asthma and Immunology Foundation.

The 2009 conference began with welcome remarks from Dr. Ian Graham, Vice-President, Knowledge Translation at the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) followed by Dr. Malcolm King, Scientific Director at the CIHR Institute of Aboriginal Peoples' Health and Dr. David O'Brien, Senior Program Officer at the International Development Research Centre.

In addition, the opening key-note presentation was provided by Jean-Claude Gavrel, Associate Vice-President of the Networks of Centres of Excellence (NCE) Program who provided an overview of the NCE Program with a focus on 'Mobilizing Canada's S&T Talent for Canada's Prosperity'. Nora Sobolov, President and CEO of The Canadian Lung Association was a key-note presenter whose remarks assisted AllerGen investigators in ascertaining information about research opportunities and potential partnership opportunities with the National Lung Health Framework.

These presentations provided AllerGen investigators with new insights into potential collaborations with a variety of funders and partner organizations with potential to facilitate and accelerate the translation of research results into economic and social benefits for Canadians, including new policies and better health.

Drs. Susan Wasserman and Charles Frankish provided conference delegates with an update on our collective efforts in respect to development of an action plan to ensure the future of the allergy and clinical immunology specialty, as well the next steps and opportunities for AllerGen and others to contribute to the action plan's implementation.

Research leaders from each of the sites participating in the Canadian Healthy Infant Longitudinal (CHILD) Study provided an update on the status of the birth cohort study and on the progress of the Mini-CHILD pilot study.

We were also fortunate to have Kevin McDuffie and Dr. Terry Delovitch contribute to Dr. Diana Royce's overview of the Network-Supported Intellectual Property (NSIP) Advisory Committee

and outline how the Committee can provide vital IP advice and assistance to Allergen researchers.

The newly formed Policy, Ethics, Law and Society (PELS) Advisory Committee was presented to the conference by Co-Chair Dr. Susan Elliott who outlined the Committee's plans to build sustainable links between Allergen researchers and Canadian policymakers. Dr. Chris Mody provided an update on the Advanced Education and Training Opportunities (AETOC) Advisory Committee and its strategies to increase the pool of highly qualified personnel in Canada who have the knowledge and skills to conduct and apply cutting-edge research in the area of allergy and asthma and related immune disease. More information on these committees and the slides from all of this year's conference presentations are available on the Allergen website at http://www.allergen-nce.ca/Events/Past_Events/2009_Annual_Research_Conference.html.

Over two days, investigators had the opportunity to liaise with fellow researchers to discuss the upcoming call for proposals. Each research programme area held workshops to discuss the development of programmatically linked research proposals followed by research project focused meetings where investigators could speak to other researchers from around the country undertaking similar research and facilitate the assembly of multidisciplinary teams and projects to be fleshed out in the Letters of Intent, due March 15, 2009. This process resulted in new opportunities for data sharing and collaboration on the development of new research proposals.

To close the conference, we were joined by Dr. Ulrich Krull, Professor of Bioanalytical Chemistry at the University of Toronto, who is a nationally acclaimed researcher and innovator. Dr. Krull shared his many and varied experiences with knowledge transfer and commercialization in the field of science and technology.

Following the conference, Dr. Susan Elliott hosted a Policy Workshop attended by 38 researchers, trainees, policy makers and elected officials, at which Network research and strategies were presented to facilitate the impact and influence of research on policy making and change. Numerous methods were identified for establishing contact with policy decision makers and as a result, further meetings have been planned between several of the attendees and a report from this meeting is to be released in April 2009.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank the attendees, presenters, conference sponsors and the Research Coordinators who supported this year's Allergen annual conference.

New Network Appointments

The Allergen Board of Directors is pleased to announce two new members. We would like to welcome Dr. Gail Gauvreau, Associate Professor of Medicine at McMaster University and Network Investigator in Allergen's Clinical Investigator Collaborative (CIC). Every year the Network Investigators elect a representative from their ranks to serve on the Board for a one-year term and Dr. Gauvreau has been nominated as the Network Investigator Representative for 2009-2010.

We would also like to welcome Dr. Gloria Jordana, Respiratory Lifecycle Director for AstraZeneca Canada, to the Board of Directors. Dr. Jordana represents the private sector perspective and we are delighted to welcome her "aboard". AstraZeneca has been a Platinum sponsor of Allergen's Research Conferences for each of the past four years. Both these new Board Members bring years of experience and research and industry knowledge to the Board. With their input we look forward to a productive and rewarding year ahead.

Call for Proposals

AllerGen has launched its third call for proposals for allergic and related disease research and development initiatives. AllerGen has invited proposals for multidisciplinary, networked and partnered programmes of research that it could support to 2012 towards the achievement of its goal of reducing the impact of allergic and related immune diseases nationally and globally.

Letters of Intent (LOI) for programmatically linked and networked research project budgets in the range of \$50,000 - \$200,000 per annum were due on March 15, 2009. Thirty eight LOIs were received and are currently under review by AllerGen's Research Management Committee (RMC) and the International Scientific Excellence Advisory Committee (ISEAC) for scientific excellence, alignment, priority and fit with the Network's mandate and strategic goals. In early April a limited number of applicants will receive invitations to submit networked Full Proposals.

Invited full proposals are due by May 31, 2009, and will undergo review by AllerGen's arm's-length ISEAC in June 2009. Applicants will receive notification of the outcome of the review by mid-July 2009, and successful teams will begin to receive funding installments by August 1, 2009.

In this Request for Proposals (RFP), AllerGen largely expects to fund networked projects aligned with one of its research programmes or teams that are potentially or actually translational in nature, focusing on projects primarily, but not exclusively, in the applied stages of study rather than purely basic discovery stage. Thus, for the next phase of funding, AllerGen investments in research aim to provide Canadian university researchers with a bridge across the gap that exists between discovery-based research and its translation into clinical, policy, practice and commercial outcomes.

The RFP, related forms and frequently asked questions are available for downloading from the AllerGen web-site at www.allergen-nce.ca/Research/RFP2009-2012.html .

Other Network Funding Opportunities

Current AllerGen Investigators have an opportunity to apply for in-year research funding. Available funding will support strategically important commercialization and knowledge translation initiatives, especially those resulting from AllerGen-supported research in the Network's initial round of funding (2005-07); programmatic or network-level research partnership development; and capacity-building initiatives.

Proposals for new, smaller scale, strategic research and knowledge translation and commercialization initiatives arising from Network research investments are welcome at any time throughout the year. Funding for these three types of initiatives is available through separate processes outlined on AllerGen's website at http://www.allergen-nce.ca/Research/In-Year_Research_Funding_Programme.html .

IPI Program Extension

AllerGen received notice from the NCE program on February 24, 2009 that use of the remaining International Partnership Initiative program funding, which was slated to terminate on March 31, 2009, may be extended subject to application and approval by the NCE program, for a period of one additional year. No new funds have been committed to this program to date, however, the NCE has engaged a consulting firm to review the program and advise on its impact and value.

The results will help the NCE program determine whether or not to recommend to government additional funding for international collaborative activities for future years.

It is notable that new NCEs competing in the current round of funding for "classic" NCE status may, unlike the currently funded "classic" NCEs, use base NCE funds for international research collaborations and interactions.

NCE Annual Meeting

On February 25-27, 2009 we attended the annual NCE "all Networks" meeting in Winnipeg. For the first time there were representatives of all four types of NCE initiatives in attendance.

In 2007, the NCE announced that it would add three new program types to further address the "innovation gap" between valuable research results and the new, marketable products and services that drive economic growth. These new types of NCEs have a five year term which is renewable once, with a third term that must be partner led.

- Classic NCEs, which includes AllerGen and 17 other Centres are the only centres to be funded for seven years with one renewal opportunity. Their mandate is to mobilize Canada's research talent in the academic, private and public sectors and apply it to the task of developing the economy and improving the quality of life of Canadians. These NCE's are research-driven partnerships with longer-term goals.
- Business-led NCEs (BL- NCE) aim to increase industry research and development capacity through public-private collaborations encouraging sector-driven/problem-driven research partnerships. There are currently four BL-NCEs focusing on health, information and communication technologies, environment, natural resources and business.
- The Centres of Excellence for Commercialization and Research (CECR) support research and/or commercialization that bring together people, services, and research infrastructure to position Canada at the forefront of breakthrough innovations in priority areas. There are currently 17 CECRs focusing on a variety of areas including health, energy/natural resources, information and communication technologies and environment.

The meeting was attended by all Network Scientific Directors, Managing Directors and Communications Officers.

Also in attendance was Dr. Suzanne Fortier, President, NSERC and Dr. Alain Beaudet, President, CIHR, Jean-Claude Gavrel, Vice-President of the NCE Program, and key note speaker Dr. Tom Brzustowski, former President NSERC and RBC Financial Group Professor in the Commercialization of Innovation at the University of Ottawa and Chair of the board Institute for Quantum Computing in Waterloo.

The theme for this year's conference was *Managing for Success* and promoted successful management strategies to increase and facilitate collaboration. The focus of the NCE program is to support Networks that provide multifaceted solutions to complex challenges, rather than discipline-driven research.

AAAAI Annual Meeting

AllerGen was represented by several researchers and trainees at the recent American Academy of Allergy Asthma and Immunology (AAAAI) meeting in Washington on March 13-17. Drs. Judah

Denburg, Malcolm Sears and Stuart Turvey presented at a symposium organized by Dr. Denburg called *Nature and Nurture in the Development of Allergy and Asthma*. The session, which provided an overview of AllerGen and the CHILD study, was chaired by Dr. Sears. Presenters Drs. Denburg and Turvey were joined by Dr. Adnan Custovic from Manchester who was involved with an English birth cohort study called the Manchester Asthma and Allergy Study (MAAS).

AllerGen Workshops

Finally, we would like to thank Drs. Dean Befus and Anita Kozyrskyj for hosting a very productive Mind-Body research workshop in December 2008, which helped position AllerGen's Mind-Body researchers for the upcoming RFP and the development of strategic priorities for AllerGen's Mind-Body research program for the second seven-year funding cycle, 2012- 2019. The workshop report is available on the AllerGen web-site at http://www.allergen-nce.ca/Research/Workshop_Reports.html .

Also, congratulations must go to Drs. Denise Daley, Tom Hudson, Jeff Brook and Peter Paré and Programme A Research Coordinator Treena MacDonald for a highly productive, international Genes and the Environment research workshop. This workshop enabled sharing of information about birth cohort research protocols and available data and samples that can be shared and compared. There was also the opportunity for methodological innovations to be shared to facilitate interaction between European and North American groups involved in large studies on asthma and allergy phenotypes. The workshop was extremely successful in leveraging the many international genetics research relationships generated over the past year through IPI-supported partnerships with GA²LEN and GABRIEL. Numerous birth cohort data-sharing and collaborative research opportunities were identified and will be pursued as a result of this outstanding workshop. The workshop presentations are available at <http://genapha.icapture.ubc.ca/workshop/talks.html> .

Feedback Welcome

We hope you find this Network Newsletter useful. This newsletter helps us share with you the many Network activities and opportunities that enable AllerGen investigators to develop 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. Any comments or suggestions you may have about this newsletter are welcome.

Please send them to us directly or email Senior Communications Officer Jessie Ielati at ielati@mcmaster.ca .



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