



BC Research Institute for Children's & Women's Health

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For Immediate Release

## **Groundbreaking Blood and Marrow Transplant Research to Help Children with Leukemia**

*Cutting edge work receives big funding boost from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research and Wyeth Pharmaceuticals*

**VANCOUVER** - Blood and marrow transplants (BMT) are performed on more than 1,200 adults, adolescents and children every year in Canada to treat life threatening disorders including leukemia, other cancers and devastating inherited children's diseases. In an announcement made today at the BC Research Institute for Children's and Women's Health, pediatric oncologist, Dr. Kirk Schultz, became the fourth recipient of a clinical research chair in transplantation funded through a partnership of the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), Wyeth Pharmaceuticals, the University of British Columbia and the BC Children's Hospital Foundation. Of the four awards given, this was the only one given in the area of Blood and Marrow Transplantation and to a pediatrician.

This prestigious research funding will allow Dr. Schultz to continue his groundbreaking research with the goal of making blood and marrow transplants safer. Dr. Schultz is working to decrease the rejection process called graft-versus-host disease (GVHD) and to improve the cure rate offered by blood and marrow transplantation for children with leukemia. Dr. Schultz is a pediatric oncologist and BMT physician at BC Children's Hospital, an associate professor at the University of British Columbia and a principal investigator at the BC Research Institute for Children's and Women's Health.

"This award means a great deal and will allow me to concentrate on GVHD in order to achieve the next level of understanding, resulting in better prevention and treatment," said Dr. Schultz. "It is such a privilege to do this work and see the impact it has on patients."

Since 1980 the cure rate for childhood leukemia has soared to 80 per cent compared to 25 per cent due in part to BMT. As Canada's second most common transplant, researchers are working on increasing the availability of BMT through alternative donor sources. This technique unfortunately comes with an increase in graft-versus-host disease (GVHD). In contrast to the more common situation of a patient rejecting a transplanted organ, GVHD results when the transplanted bone marrow rejects the recipient patient.

Four Chairs in transplantation have been created through a partnership between CIHR and Wyeth Pharmaceuticals. The Chairs enable the researchers and their respective institutions to develop internationally competitive programs that will advance transplantation research in Canada. The \$4.4 million funding for the four Chairs (\$1.1 million each) is contributed by CIHR, Wyeth Pharmaceuticals and the recipient universities.

"This partnership is an outstanding example of the important health research taking place through academic/industry collaboration across Canada," said Dr. Bruce McManus, Scientific Director of CIHR's Institute of Circulatory and Respiratory Health. "Dr. Schultz's work will create new knowledge and advance our understanding of bone and marrow transplantation."

"Canadian researchers and physicians have been at the forefront of transplantation research," said Dr. Aldo Baumgartner, President and CEO of Wyeth Pharmaceuticals. "This creative partnership demonstrates Wyeth Pharmaceuticals' commitment to furthering Canadian research in the field of transplantation that could ultimately change the current standards of practice and improve outcomes for patients in Canada and around the world."

The three other Chair recipients are:

- Dr. Li Zhang of the University of Toronto – Dr. Zhang is studying the mechanisms involved in donor-specific transplant tolerance. She wants to develop new approaches of antigen-specific suppression.
- Dr. Norman Kneteman of the University of Alberta – Dr. Kneteman will conduct research with the aim of reducing the toxicity of immunosuppressive therapies and develop prevention models for recurring Hepatitis C, the leading cause of liver transplants.
- Dr. James Shapiro of the University of Alberta – Dr. Shapiro will conduct research in pancreatic islet transplantation (known as the Edmonton Protocol) that could ultimately reduce or eliminate the need for people with Type 1 diabetes to take insulin.

Selection of the Chair recipients was based on scientific excellence. All applications were judged according to CIHR's Peer Review process and were subject to CIHR guidelines.

*The CIHR/Rx&D Research Program is a jointly funded program that facilitates productive and effective partnerships between academic health researchers, the pharmaceutical industry and government and supports the training and development of health research personnel in Canada.*

*CIHR is Canada's premier 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 health care system.*

*Wyeth is one of the world's largest research-driven pharmaceutical and health care products companies. It is a leader in the discovery, development, manufacturing and marketing of pharmaceuticals, vaccines, biotechnology products and non-prescription medicines that improve the quality of life for people worldwide.*

*In Canada, Wyeth employs over 1,700 people across the country. The Wyeth Pharmaceuticals Division maintains commercial offices in Markham, Ontario and manufacturing and R&D facilities in Saint-Laurent, Quebec with leading products in the areas of women's health care, central nervous system, inflammation, hemophilia and vaccines.*

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