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THE UNIVERSITY OF
BRITISH COLUMBIA

UBC Public Affairs

310 – 6251 Cecil Green Park Rd.
Vancouver B.C. Canada V6T 1Z1

www.publicaffairs.ubc.ca

Tel: 604.822.3131
Fax: 604.822.2684
E-mail: public.affairs@ubc.ca

UBC News Line:
604.UBC.NEWS (822.6397)



Contact:
Brian Lin
UBC Public Affairs
Tel. 604.822.2234
Cell. 604.818.5685
Email: brian.lin@ubc.ca

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UBC scientists key contributors to national research network on aging

Identification of the ‘longevity gene’ and better understanding of the interaction between genes and the environment will be some of the key contributions University of British Columbia researchers and their teams at partner institutions make to the Canadian Longitudinal Survey on Aging (CLSA).

Launched today in Hamilton, the \$30-million Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR)-funded project brings together 160 researchers from 26 universities across Canada. Researchers will follow 50,000 Canadians aged 45-85 over the next 20 years. The study will increase the understanding of common health problems affecting seniors.

The Brain Research Centre (BRC) at UBC and the Vancouver Coastal Health Research Institute will be one of 11 data collection sites across Canada. BRC Director Max Cynader and Jon Stoessl, director of the Pacific Parkinson’s Research Centre at UBC and VCH, will track 1,500 B.C. participants at three-year intervals.

The Centre for Molecular Medicine and Therapeutics (CMMT), affiliated with UBC and located at the Child & Family Research Institute, is one of four national centres coordinating different aspects of the study. It will serve as the national headquarters for genetics and epigenetics data collection and analysis.

“Most of the genomics studies on human aging have focused on disease susceptibility,” says CMMT Director Michael Hayden. “CLSA provides us with the opportunity to learn about the determinants of healthy aging and will move us towards identifying genes associated with longevity.”

A team led by CMMT Scientist and UBC Medical Genetics Prof. Michael Kobor will also examine environmental factors – both physical and social – that affect the expression of genes. Incidence of disease varies according to life circumstances, an emerging area called epigenetics.

“Our work aims to understand the interaction of genes with the environment and what this means to healthy aging,” says Kobor.

“This is an important step forward in the study of human aging,” says Cynader. “The ability to collect biological, environmental, and genomic information on this large scale will provide profound insights into successful aging.”



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“Aging is a reality for all Canadians but very little is known about how and why we age the way we do,” said Dr. Anne Martin-Matthews, CIHR’s scientific director. “The CLSA will help unlock some of the greatest mysteries of aging and identify the social and biological factors that have the most impact on our health over time.”

Within the next two decades, approximately 22 per cent of the Canadian population will be 65 years of age or older. This nationwide study will help answer questions impacting the quality of their life and what the relationship between genes and the environment means to healthy aging.

For more information on the CLSA, visit www.clsa-elcv.ca. The CIHR announcement is available at www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/39423.html.

The Brain Research Centre comprises more than 200 investigators with multidisciplinary expertise in neuroscience research ranging from the test tube, to the bedside, to industrial spin-offs. The centre is a partnership of UBC and VCHRI. For more information, visit www.brain.ubc.ca.

The Centre for Molecular Medicine and Therapeutics is a synergistic group of scientists and researchers who share a strong sense of commitment to solve the many genetic questions surrounding human illness and well being. Affiliated with the University of British Columbia and the Child & Family Research Institute, CMMT conducts discovery research and translates that research into effective clinical and therapeutic strategies to promote health. For more information, visit www.cmmt.ubc.ca.

The Child & Family Research Institute conducts discovery research, clinical investigation, and applied health research to benefit the health of children and families. It is the largest research institute of its kind in Western Canada. CFRI works in close partnership with BC Children’s Hospital and Sunny Hill Health Centre for Children, and BC Women’s Hospital & Health Centre, agencies of the Provincial Health Services Authority; BC Children’s Hospital Foundation; UBC and Simon Fraser University. For more information, visit www.cfri.ca.

The UBC Faculty of Medicine provides innovative programs in the health and life sciences, teaching students at the undergraduate, graduate and postgraduate levels, and generates more than \$200 million in research funding each year. In 2007/08, out of the total UBC research endeavour, 53 per cent, or \$247 million, came from academic and clinical teams in the Faculty of Medicine. For more information, visit www.med.ubc.ca.

VCH Research Institute is the research body of Vancouver Coastal Health Authority. In academic partnership with UBC, the institute advances health research and innovation across B.C., Canada, and beyond. www.vchri.ca