The Terry Fox Research Institute
L'Institut de recherche Terry Fox

Media Backgrounder
Terry Fox Foundation New Investigators Award Recipients

The Terry Fox Foundation announced the four recipients of its New Investigator Awards, which totals $1.8 million. The investigators, research projects, and the relationships to existing TFF funded projects are outlined below:

Dr. Ryan Brinkman
Associate Professor of Medical Genetics, University of British Columbia
Senior Scientist, BC Cancer Agency's Terry Fox Laboratory
Award: $435,252

Dr. Ryan Brinkman's work focuses on developing new methodologies for high throughput bioinformatics to facilitate research that will improve diagnosis and treatment of blood cancers. His project examines flow informatics approaches for the identification of normal and malignant stem cells. Dr. Brinkman will develop automated approaches for analyzing large amounts of flow cytometry data and for minimizing human errors that may miss small, but significant sub-populations of cells.

Dr. Brinkman's work is closely integrated with the TFF New Frontiers Program Project led by Principal Investigator, Dr. Keith Humphries. Dr. Humphries' team is studying the properties and control mechanisms that regulate the rare and primitive cells in the bone marrow that are responsible for life long production of blood cells. They are examining the changes that turn healthy blood cells into leukemia cells.

Linked Project: Cell fate control of normal and malignant stem cells
TFF New Frontiers Funding: $5.1 million
Principal Investigator: Dr. Keith Humphries
Senior Scientist, BC Cancer Agency

Dr. Cathie Garnis
Award: $450,000
Assistant Professor, Division of Otolaryngology, University of British Columbia Faculty of Medicine
Senior Scientist, BC Cancer Agency

Over the next three years, Dr. Cathie Garnis' major focus will be on early detection of lung cancer. Dr. Garnis is examining opportunities to develop simple, cost-effective

blood tests to be used to diagnose lung cancer. In particular, her objectives are to identify markers of lung cancer that can be detected in the bloodstream and to evaluate the usefulness of the markers for early detection of lung cancer. Dr. Garnis' project is entitled, "Circulating microRNAs as a lung tumour proxy: determining whether a small RNA species in plasma can be used as an early cancer detection tool."

Dr. Garnis' project is part of Principal Investigator Dr. Stephen Lam's study – Early Detection of Lung Cancer: A Pan-Canadian Study. Dr. Lam's team's research is designed to develop a new multi-modal screening strategy for the early detection of lung cancer. Through the study, the team will evaluate the effectiveness of using questionnaires, breathing and blood tests to identify high-risk individuals. By using these tests to triage high-risk individuals, the hope is to help identify those who could be recommended for further follow up, should screening be found to be effective.

Linked Project: Early Detection of Lung Cancer: A Pan-Canadian Study
TFF & Canadian Partnership Against Cancer Funding: $6.7 million
Principal Investigator: Dr. Stephen Lam
Professor of Medicine, University of British Columbia
Chair, Provincial Lung Tumor Group, BC Cancer Agency

Dr. Amina Zoubeidi
Assistant Professor, Department of Urologic Sciences, University of British Columbia
Research Scientist, Vancouver Prostate Centre at VGH
Award: $449,964

Through her project, "Defining the role of Lyn kinase in prostate cancer progression to castrate resistance stage," Dr. Amina Zoubeidi's ultimate goal is to improve treatment for patients diagnosed with prostate cancer. Specifically, she will examine whether the Lyn kinase protein enables the progression of prostate cancer, and if inhibiting it will stop progression before the diseases reaches the castration resistant prostate cancer stage (CRPC).

Dr. Zoubeidi's work will complement the Principal Investigator Paul Rennie's program project on prostate cancer progression. Dr. Rennie's team is studying how prostate cancers change from being dependent on male sex hormones – androgens -- to not needing them. The team is seeking to understand the process by which prostate cancer cells become independent of androgens for their own growth, and to use the knowledge to create new treatments.

Linked Project: Terry Fox/NCIC program on prostate cancer progression
TFF New Frontiers Project Funding: $6.8 million
Principal Investigator: Dr. Paul Rennie
Professor of Urologic Sciences, University of British Columbia

Director of Laboratory Research, Vancouver Prostate Centre at VGH

Dr. Uri Tabori
Award: $448,520
Staff Physician, Division of Haematology /Oncology at Sick Kids
Scientist, Genetics and Genome Biology Program at Sick Kids
Assistant Professor in the Department of Paediatrics, University of Toronto

Dr. Uri Tabori's research focuses on pediatric neural tumours, which are the main cause of death from childhood cancer. He is examining telomerase, an enzyme that is active in small populations of cells in pediatric neural tumours, and has observed that normal cells are less dependent on telomerase for self-renewal. His project is entitled "Exhaustion of tumour initiating cells by targeting their self-renewal capacity with telomerase inhibition."

Dr. Tabori's research will build on Principal Investigator Dr. Rob Rottapel's Selective Therapies Target Identification program. Dr. Rottapel's team is developing cancer therapies that target and destroy cancer cells without harming healthy cells. Their work is designed to develop more effective treatments and reduce patient side effects.

Linked Project: OICR-TFRI Selective Therapies Program
Ontario Institute for Cancer Research and Terry Fox Research Institute
Funding : $23 million
Principal Investigator: Dr. Robert Rottapel
Professor, University of Toronto and University Health Network