



Canadian Gene Cure Foundation Awards
Dr. Helen Dimaras a \$90,000
Champions of Genetics: Building the Next Generation Grant

July 25, 2011, Victoria BC - The Canadian Gene Cure Foundation (CGCF) is pleased to announce the awarding of a \$90,000 Champions of Genetics: Building the Next Generation Grant to Dr. Helen Dimaras for her research on childhood genetic retinoblastoma. The Champions of Genetics is a new award initiative of the CGCF that celebrates generations of excellence in Canadian genetics.

Canadian scientists are world leaders in human genetic research and in the discovery and advancement of cures for inherited genetic diseases. The Champions of Genetics initiative was created to both honour past genetic successes of Canada's accomplished senior scientists and ensure excellence continues in future generations of Canadian geneticists by providing financial support and encouraging mentorship early in their careers.

Genetic scientists just starting their research careers face many obstacles including heavy teaching assignments, low research budgets and difficulties recruiting highly qualified personnel. The Next Generation Grant provides much needed funding to promising young scientists, such as Dr. Dimaras, to hire graduate students or post doctoral researchers in their laboratories. The grant allows them to advance their own exciting genetic research while mentoring yet the next generation of scientists; thus perpetuating Canada's level of excellence in genetic research.

Dr. Dimaras was awarded the Next Generation Grant for her project entitled "Personal Tumor Biomarkers for Surveillance of Disseminated Retinoblastoma." The objective of this research program is to bring high-level science to the treatment and care of children with the genetic cancer retinoblastoma. In a small pilot study, Dr. Dimaras discovered that personalized biomarkers can be used to screen for disseminated disease more effectively than standard cytological screening. She will now be able to pursue a multicentre international study of this molecular screening technique for emergence of metastasis and/or minimal residual disease. Ultimately, the hope is that earlier detection and intervention will improve cure rates world-wide.

"I am honoured to be a grantee of the Canadian Gene Cure Foundation, which has shown it is dedicated to not only Canadian genetic researchers, but also demonstrates a strong faith in the potential of the new cohort of young investigators like myself to push Canadian science forward," Dr. Dimaras.

To be eligible for the grant, an applicant must have been nominated by a Champion of Genetics senior scientist as chosen by the CGCF Board of Directors. Accomplished geneticist Dr. Brenda Gallie was the 2011 Champion who nominated Dr. Dimaras, a trainee whom she personally mentored, to apply for the grant.

"Helen demonstrates outstanding capacity in scientific excellence and leadership in delivery and discovery in global genetics," said Champion, Dr. Brenda Gallie.

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Background:

About the Canadian Gene Cure Foundation:

The Canadian Gene Cure Foundation (CGCF) is a registered Canadian charitable organization, formed in 1999 to raise much-needed funds for medical genetics research in Canada.

The Foundation's primary goal is to raise funds to enable Canadian scientists to discover cures and treatments for inherited diseases. In addition to the annual research grants awarded, the Foundation recognizes the importance of mentoring Canada's future scientists and hosts the annual Gene Researcher for a Week program aimed at providing unique educational opportunities for high school students across the country. The Foundation also supports networking opportunities in which scientists can exchange ideas and work cooperatively, linking advances in different disease areas. Specifically, the CGCF supports the annual Canadian Human Genetics Conference in partnership with the CIHR Institute of Genetics.

Canadian scientists are world-leaders in gene discovery and genetic research and have discovered genes relating to hundreds of disorders, including cystic fibrosis, juvenile diabetes, muscular dystrophy, dyslexia, Huntington disease, Alzheimer's disease, breast cancer, colon cancer, cardiovascular disease and epilepsy. Through active fundraising, the Canadian Gene Cure Foundation can continue to support Canadian Scientists and their contributions to human genetics research.

www.genecure.ca

Champions of Genetics Programme

The Champions of Genetics programme was designed with multiple benefits, in that it celebrates high-caliber scientific excellence of both highly respected senior scientists, and the rising stars that they have mentored.

The first phase of recognition in the program identifies and honours Canada's long established scientists, our Champions of Genetics. The Canadian Gene Cure Foundation's Board of Directors is responsible for developing the criteria on how these esteemed few are chosen, criteria that will vary in focus from year to year. In 2011, the Board elected to acknowledge individuals responsible for establishing the dynamic Canadian Genetic Diseases Network, one of Canada's successful and highly productive Networks of Centres of Excellence, of which the Canadian Gene Cure Foundation is a legacy.

Part of the honour afforded the Champions of Genetics is the opportunity to nominate one of their former trainees to apply for a Champions of Genetics: Building the Next Generation Grant from the Canadian Gene Cure Foundation. Nominees must have excellent leadership potential, have experience running their own independent laboratory at a Canadian research institute for seven years or less and be on the path to becoming the next generation of Canada's most respected senior scientists. The projects the nominees put forth in their application must demonstrate excellent science and have therapeutic potential in the near future.

This year, three of the nominees have been awarded a two-year grant. The grant recipients will be expected to use the grant funding to hire and mentor a post-doctoral fellow. This stipulation allows them the opportunity to not only further advance their own exciting research projects but to continue the important tradition of mentorship bringing strength and a continuity of excellence to the Canadian research community.

Dr. Helen Dimaras, PhD Bio Sketch

Dr. Helen Dimaras, PhD, completed her doctoral degree in the Department of Molecular and Medical Genetics at the University of Toronto. Her thesis work focused on the molecular genetic development of childhood eye cancer, retinoblastoma. After completing her degree, Helen was struck by the fact that her research only reached a minority of the world's affected children, while the reality for the majority was suboptimal care. She pursued post-doctoral training in clinical trials and global retinoblastoma research. She coordinates the Multicenter Trial of the "Toronto Protocol" for treatment of bilateral retinoblastoma, currently active in Toronto, Vancouver, Montreal, Singapore and India. She is a member of the Steering Committee that produced the Canadian National Retinoblastoma Guidelines for Care, a document that is useful not only in Canadian practice but also to other nations wishing to form a Retinoblastoma Strategy. Through her involvement with Daisy's Eye Cancer Fund, Helen works with the Kenyan National Retinoblastoma Strategy to bring sustainable, evidence-based care for retinoblastoma to East Africa. She is also a sessional lecturer at the University of Toronto, where she teaches courses in Global Health Research and Genetics in the Department of Human Biology.