

VITAL SIGNS



THE NEWSLETTER OF MCGILL UNIVERSITY DEPARTMENT OF MEDICINE

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WORD FROM THE CHAIR

*Dr. David Eidelman, MD
Chair, Department of Medicine*



MY SHAKY DOUBLE LIFE

I lead a sort of double life. So do most of you. I am fulfilling two mandates at the same time, acting both as Chair of the McGill Department of Medicine and Physician-in-Chief of the MUHC. Of course, the double nature of my existence is normally hardly worth mentioning. But every once in a while something important happens that highlights its importance. Right now that something is the renegotiation of the Contract of Affiliation between the Hospital and the University. Negotiations between the MUHC and McGill have just started. Each side has created a negotiating committee to defend its interests. As in any such negotiation, there is an inevitable element of confrontation to these discussions. In consequence, each side has included lawyers and consultants on its team.

From what one hears, there are important disagreements between the partners. For example, the Faculty would like more transparency in regard to management of the money it sends to the hospital for teaching each year. Moreover, the Faculty would like the MUHC to make teaching a higher priority, including the creation of a senior management position for Education. With regard to governance, McGill would like more flexibility concerning the nomination of department chairs. Currently, MUHC department chiefs are also named McGill Chair by default. Given the changes in context and the evolution of the MUHC and other teaching institutions in the McGill network, it is not

UPCOMING VISITING SPEAKERS TO GRAND ROUNDS

RVH/MGH Tuesdays at 12:00 PM

April 1 — Dr. Michael Gardam, University of Toronto

May 13 — Dr. Finlay McAlister, University of Alberta

May 27 — Dr. Markus Stoffel
Institute of Molecular Systems Biology, Zurich

JGH Mondays at 12:30 PM

April 14 — Dr. Hertz C. Gerstein, McMaster University

May 5 — Dr. Louise C. Walter, UCSF

May 26 — Dr. Christy Simpson, Dalhousie University

June 2 — Dr. Richard Burt, Northwestern University, Chicago

clear if this arrangement is still appropriate.

On the Hospital side, there are questions raised about the financial support granted by the University for hospital-based training. At present, this financing only partially covers the associated costs. There are also important issues surrounding research. For example, how does one go about renewing the Research Institute of the MUHC (RI) in the context of a hiring freeze? Moreover, the University is not always able to provide information about the RI that the FRSQ requires, and which is needed for budgetary planning. Thus, for its part, the Hospital can be expected to also ask for greater transparency with regard to its financial relations with McGill.

While this negotiation is only required by the MUHC, all of McGill's teaching hospitals sign a contract stipulating the rules of the game with regard to their relations with the University. This new contract will serve as the model for the other teaching hospitals. It is thus of interest to the

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entire Department that the two parties rapidly come to a friendly agreement. Unfortunately, the stumbling blocks are many and the problems to be sorted out are complex. The risk of a conflict is therefore real. Let's hope that we can avoid the fate of certain American universities where similar negotiations damaged relations between the partners over the long term and even led to a complete break.

Our leaders must remember that the ambiguity of our double life is one of the secrets of our success. In a resource starved environment, overlap allows us to reinforce the strengths of the Hospital with those of the University, and vice-versa. It is essential that the current negotiations avoid anything that could weaken the links between our two lives.

WORD FROM THE VICE-CHAIR, RESEARCH



Dr. Ernesto Schiffrin, MD, PhD, FRSC, FRCPC

CLINICIAN INVESTIGATOR PROGRAM

The disappearance of the clinician investigator has been repeatedly predicted, which is reminiscent of a quote from Mark Twain, who in response to a rumor of his demise is reported to have said, "The news of my death has been greatly exaggerated". Unfortunately, the impending disappearance of the clinical investigator is no exaggeration; rather it is a reality we are not doing enough to prevent. There is no doubt that the long years of training necessary, the difficulties in peer-review funding competitions, the frustrations with lower pay, long hours and family demands, and the challenge of being published in competitive scientific journals, do not encourage young physicians to embark on a research career. Particularly when compared to the challenges and rewards of clinical practice or academic careers with an emphasis on teaching.

However, research-intensive universities like McGill must strive to produce a new generation of physician-scientists who will carry out needed

translational research. To this end, the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada, recognizing the need to contribute to the career development of clinician investigators, has created the Clinician Investigator Program (CIP). This program is designed to ensure that a formal postgraduate medical education program exists which, while fulfilling specialty/subspecialty training requirements, also provides "integrated and structured rigorous research training", to quote the RCPSC website. Two paths are available within CIP: the Continuous Training path (CT) and the Distributive Curriculum Training (DCT). CT involves at least 2 years of intensive research training, done at varying stages of residency training. DCT is destined for residents who already have research experience, who will enter the PGY1 year for both CIP and the specialty/subspecialty training program. Research training may be in all areas pertaining to health from wet lab to epidemiology and population research to economics, management and social, behavioral and information sciences.

Mark Blostein now heads McGill University's successful CIP program, ably led until recently by Mark Trifiro. While the program complies with all RCPSC requirements, it is in the process of being shaken up a little and updated by Dr. Blostein, based on the recommendations of the last RCPSC accreditation visit.

It is important to note that CIP does not provide for retrospective recognition of credits. Residents must register and begin their research for DCT at PGY1, and for CT before or upon finishing their last year of specialty/subspecialty training. If they move to another institution for their CIP training, they must register within 6 months. Research must be supervised by an independent investigator with established research funding, and comply with local CIP requirements. Further information is available at the website of the RCPSC.

However, the CIP alone is not enough. Years ago, as a member of a CIHR committee on clinician-scientist's careers, I proposed a program to bring students to clinical research facilities and then nurture, protect, encourage and guide these individuals during the long and difficult path to become competitive independent investigators. Indeed, some of our Department members take this task very seriously, and look for individuals with potential, then lure them into the lab, drug

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them with science, light the sacred fire, care for them like jewels, and succeed in bringing them back to become star scientists who raise McGill's profile in the world of research and innovation while contributing to advance our ability to better treat our patients.

I call on all members of our Department to be on the lookout for those rare individuals with potential for a career as clinician-scientists. We must enroll them in the CIP then nurture them during their specialization and research training and do our best to attract them back to join the faculty. Clinician-scientists are essential if McGill is to fulfill its objective of being one of the leading learning and training institutions in the world, performing cutting-edge research that will help us conquer disease for the benefit of all Canadians.

For further details, please visit the Clinician Investigator Program at the [RCPSC website](#) and [Post Graduate Medical Education/Programs/CIP](#) at the McGill Faculty of Medicine website.

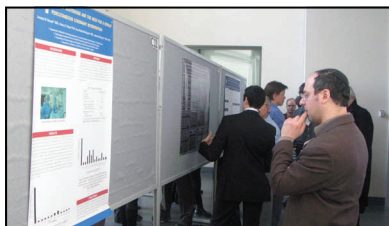


THE MCGILL CARDIOVASCULAR RESEARCH DAY

*Dr. Mark Eisenberg
Associate Professor*

This year's McGill Cardiovascular Research Day, held at the Jewish General Hospital, was a great success. The event was a novel opportunity to highlight the current work taking place at McGill University in Cardiovascular Research. The event highlighted research in three major fields: basic science, clinical science, and population science. Students at varying levels of their careers (graduate students, medical students, residents, fellows, and research trainees) were given the opportunity to display their current research projects. The scientific sessions included 60 oral and poster presentations. In addition to the scientific sessions, Dr. Pavel Hamet, Professor of Medicine (University of Montreal), Canada Research Chair in Predictive Genomics and Chief of Gene Medicine at the CHUM, gave a keynote session highlighting the future of predictive genomics in cardiovascular disease.

This year five students were awarded the title of best oral or poster presentation. The award recipients were Talin Ebrahimian for "*Angiotensin*



II-induced Cardiac Hypertrophy is Associated With Downregulation of Thioredoxin and Increased Apoptosis Signal Kinase-1 in Estrogen-Deficient Follitropin Receptor Knockout Mice", Christine St.Germaine for "*Genetic Polymorphisms and the Cardiovascular Risk Of COX-2 Inhibitors*", Raluca Ionescu-Iltu for "*Increases in Folic Acid Intake in the Preconceptional Period Reduce Birth Prevalence of Severe Congenital Heart Disease*", Amanda Kasneci for "*Early Growth Response Factor 1 (EGR-1) Negatively Regulates Expression of Calsequestrin in Cardiomyocytes in Vitro*", and Zuhier Awan for "*Vascular Calcifications in Homozygote Familial Hypercholesterolemia: The Canadian Experience*". Congratulations to the award recipients and all other student presenters for their exceptional work.

THE DIVISION OF EXPERIMENTAL MEDICINE

Dr. Hugh Bennett

The Experimental Medicine Unit at McGill University was created just after World War II in order to provide full staff membership for Ph.D., non-M.D. investigators in the Department of Medicine. At the beginning, nearly all of the investigators were located in the research laboratories of the Royal Victoria Hospital. Hospital based investigators, being off campus, were with few exceptions unable to have access to graduate student programs. For the first 30 years of its existence, Experimental Medicine was a department within the Faculty of Medicine.

In 1975 the Department was converted into [the Division of Experimental Medicine](#) in order to co-

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ordinate basic science teaching of clinician scientists in the Department of Medicine. The mandate of the Division quickly broadened to include establishment of a PhD program and co-ordination of this graduate program became the main function of the Division. From 1975 to 2004 the Division only enrolled students directly into the PhD program. However, students could exit the program with an MSc if this was deemed appropriate. In 2004 the program was modified to permit entry at the MSc level with possibility of fast tracking to the PhD level. Direct entry at the PhD level for highly qualified students still continues. The Division administers two other programs; the MSc Specialization in Bioethics since 1996 and the Graduate Diploma in Clinical Research established in 2001.

Today the Division of Experimental Medicine includes 110 faculty members in multiple departments (Medicine, Pediatrics, Oncology, Obstetrics and Gynecology) who supervise almost 250 students, the largest graduate program in the Faculty of Medicine. Between 45 and 50 students graduate each year. The laboratories of Division members are mainly located in the McGill teaching hospitals and the Research Institute of the MUHC. In addition, through a long-standing association between the *Institut de recherches cliniques de Montréal* (the "IRCM"), founded by Dr. Jacques Genest Sr. in 1967, and the Department of Experimental Medicine, chaired at that time by Dr. J.S.L. Browne, investigators at the IRCM who are professors at the *Université de Montréal* are appointed Associate Members of the Division of Experimental Medicine and are also permitted to supervise graduate students at McGill University.

Potential thesis projects in the Division of Experimental Medicine cover a wide area of biomedical research, including cell biophysics, respiratory physiology, exercise physiology, neuroscience, molecular endocrinology, molecular oncology, cellular immunology, molecular virology and pharmacology. The breadth of this research reflects the translational nature of the research done by members of the Division.

McGill University has set a target to increase enrolment into graduate programs by 25% by 2010: (Strengths and Aspirations. A white paper call to action regarding McGill University's future: <http://www.mcgill.ca/files/provost/>

[Strengths and Aspirations June 2006.pdf](#). To achieve this goal we must attract the best students from Canada and abroad. To maintain and improve the quantity and quality of student intake McGill University must attract students from outside Quebec and other countries. In this regard, Experimental Medicine was subject to an external review in the summer of 2007. The external reviewer found the "academic program to be of extremely high caliber...". The goal must be to build on this traditional base of excellence. McGill University has instigated a new policy that reduces the fees charged to foreign students at the PhD level to that paid by Canadians. This will enable medical researchers to attract the best students from abroad and continue to enrich the graduate experience of our institution and to complement the multicultural nature of Montreal and the University.



Dr. Hugh Bennett is a Full Professor in the Department of Medicine and Director of the Division of Experimental Medicine. He is also Canadian Pacific - McGill Professor of Biotechnology and Director of the Sheldon Biotechnology Centre, the core facility for biomedical scientists at McGill

University. Dr. Bennett is currently using the zebrafish as an animal model to determine the role played by the progranulin growth factor family during embryonic and neuronal development. His laboratory is located at the Royal Victoria Hospital.

SABBATICAL LEAVES

All Faculty members applying for a sabbatical leave at McGill University are reminded to also contact their granting agencies as most agencies have policies on this subject. Please make a point of reviewing your granting agencies sabbatical leave policies and comply with their regulations.

PROMOTIONS

Congratulations to the members of our Department who were recently promoted!

FULL PROFESSOR

Dr. James Brophy: A member of the Cardiology and Clinical Epidemiology Divisions, Dr. Brophy is internationally known for his work on technology assessment, particularly as applied to pharmaco-epidemiology. *Conseiller scientifique* at the FRSQ, Dr. Brophy is the Director of the joint CHUM-MUHC Technology Assessment Unit.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSORS

Dr. Mark Blostein: A member of the Hematology Division at the JGH, Dr. Blostein studies gas-6, a novel anti-apoptotic factor in endothelial physiology. His lab also studies the design of hemostatic peptides to accelerate hemostasis. In addition, Dr. Blostein is an active clinical researcher in the field of anticoagulation and thrombosis and is the new Director of the CIP.

Dr. Christina Greenaway: An infectious disease specialist at the JGH, Dr. Greenaway's interest is in tuberculosis. She is particularly well known for her work on vaccine related disease epidemiology and the health status of immigrants.

Dr. Todd McConnell: Long serving Physician-in-Chief of St. Mary's Hospital and member of the Department's Executive Committee, Dr. McConnell is a distinguished clinician, educator and medical leader in the Division of General Internal Medicine. His contributions to the St. Mary's community were recently recognized when he received the prestigious Hingston Memorial Award.

Dr. Ronald Olivenstein: The Medical Director of the Montreal Chest Institute and a leader in the Division of Respiratory Diseases, Dr. Olivenstein is a leading clinician, educator and clinical researcher with an outstanding record of accomplishment in respiratory translational research, particularly in the field of asthma and respiratory immunology.

Dr. Lawrence Rudski: A member of the Cardiology Division based at the JGH, where he is Associate Division Director, Dr. Rudski is an accomplished educator who is particularly well known for his work in echocardiography, having attracted trainees from Quebec, Canada and Europe.

Dr. Vicky Tagalakis: A member of the Division of General Internal Medicine, Dr. Tagalakis is the Director of the GIM Fellowship Training Program and the Clinical Scholars Program. An accomplished educator, Dr. Tagalakis has an interest in thrombosis, an area in which she is active as an educator and researcher.

Dr. Judith Therrien: A leader in the Division of Cardiology who is based at the JGH and active within the MAUDE unit at the RVH, Dr. Therrien is one of Canada's foremost authorities on congenital heart disease in adults, an area in which she has published widely and is internationally recognized.

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR

Dr. Bert Govig is the Director of General Internal Medicine at Amos. President-elect of the Canadian Society for Internal Medicine, Dr. Govig supervises medical residents who rate their experience in Amos very highly.

APPOINTMENTS



Dr. Ken Dewar has been appointed as Acting Scientific Director of the McGill University and Génome Québec Innovation Centre. He will be responsible for leading the Innovation Centre through a transition while a search committee identifies the next Chair. A member of the Department since 2002, Dr. Dewar led the team that sequenced the deadly *C. difficile* strain residing in Quebec hospitals. We extend our congratulations to Dr. Dewar in his new position.

Dr. Mark Trifiro is assuming the role of Director of the Division of Endocrinology at the SMBD-JGH, effective December 17, 2007. Dr. Trifiro is a distinguished clinician, teacher and investigator who is widely respected across the McGill community, nationally and internationally. We wish Dr. Trifiro every success in his new role.

As she steps down from the position of Associate Dean for Research on July 1, **Dr. Janet Henderson** has been appointed as Research Director of the McGill Division of Orthopaedic Surgery. Dr. Henderson is an internationally recognized investigator in the field of bone development and remodeling, studying the pathways linked to skeletal growth factors which interact to regulate these processes in health and disease. Dr. Henderson will continue to hold an appointment in the Department.

Dr. Mark Blostein, Associate Professor in the Division of Hematology, based at the SMBD-JGH, has been appointed as Program Director for the Clinician Investigator Residency Program, starting December 1st, 2007. See Dr. Schiffrin's article in this issue for more on this important program.



RETIREMENT FROM THE MUHC ASSOCIATION OF PHYSICIANS

In December 2007, the Department of Medicine presented to **Dr. Leslie Kovacs** a certificate and a sculpture in recognition of his **36 years** of exceptional service as President of the MUHC Department of Medicine Association of Physicians and as an outstanding clinician and teacher. Dr. Kovacs is stepping down as President of the Association of Physicians, a role that is now being assumed by **Dr. Carlo Fallone**. We thank Dr. Kovacs for his dedication and hard work and wish Dr. Fallone great success in his new role.

RECRUITMENTS

Dr. Natalie Bottega has joined the Cardiology Division as an Assistant Professor and as Attending Staff of the MUHC. Originally from Montreal, Dr. Bottega completed her medical school, internal medicine and adult cardiology fellowships at McGill. She has just completed a two-year fellowship in adult congenital heart disease at the Mayo Clinic and the Toronto General Hospital. Dr. Bottega won the Outstanding Investigator Award at the International Symposium on Adult Congenital Heart Disease in 2007. She trained at the Special Pregnancy Program at Mount Sinai Hospital in Toronto and plans to establish a similar multi-disciplinary maternal cardiac clinic at McGill in 2008.

Dr. Momar Ndao has been appointed as a Medical Scientist and as an Assistant Professor in the Division of Infectious Diseases effective January 1, 2008. Dr. Ndao trained in Veterinary Medicine at the University of Cheikh Anta Diop, Dakar, Senegal after which he completed Masters and PhD degrees at the Institute of Tropical Medicine Antwerp, Belgium. In 1998, he was recruited to McGill as a post-doctoral fellow to work with Dr. Brian Ward on African and American trypanosome infections. In 2001, he became the Laboratory Director of the [National Reference Center For Parasitology \(NRCP\)](#), which is an integral part of the McGill Centre For Tropical Diseases. Since that time, he has built the NRCP into an internationally recognized resource. Dr. Ndao has collaborated on many projects with members of the McGill Centre for Tropical Diseases and the Division of Infectious Diseases, and we now welcome him as a Medical Scientist in the Division.

Dr. Simon Rousseau has joined our Department as an Assistant Professor based at the Meakins-Christie Laboratories. Dr. Rousseau obtained his PhD in cellular and molecular biology in 2000 from the Université Laval in Quebec City. During his PhD, he studied the intracellular signaling pathways activated by the Vascular Endothelial Growth factor (VEGF) leading to endothelial cell migration. He then joined the group of Professor Sir Philip Cohen at the MRC Protein Phosphorylation Unit in Dundee, Scotland, a world-renowned scientific unit in the field of signal transduction. Funded by two consecutive fellowships awarded by the CIHR, Dr. Rousseau investigated the signaling pathways involved in pro-inflammatory cytokine production by macrophages. In January 2008, he joined the Meakins-Christie Laboratories as a research director to investigate the role of intracellular signaling pathways in pulmonary inflammation.

Dr. David Stellwagen has been appointed as an Assistant Professor in the Departments of Medicine and Neurology and the [Centre for Research in Neuroscience](#). Dr. Stellwagen obtained a B.Sc. from Brown University, a PhD in Molecular and Cell Biology at Berkeley and did his post-doctoral work at Stanford University. He has 13 publications focused largely on understanding the mechanisms of synaptic remodeling in the brain. Dr. Stellwagen was recently awarded a grant from the CFI-LOF for his research project entitled "*The Effects of Tumor Necrosis Factor Alpha on Synaptic Transmission, Homeostatic Plasticity and Neuronal Adaptation*".

We welcome **Dr. Michael Sebag** to our Department as an Assistant Professor in the Division of Hematology. Dr. Sebag obtained a PhD in Molecular and Cell Biology from McGill in 1996 and his MD from the University of Toronto in 2000. He completed Internal Medicine and Hematology training at McGill University. He has recently completed a multiple myeloma research fellowship at the Mayo Clinic in Arizona. Dr. Sebag joins us as a clinician-scientist with an interest in the development and pathogenesis of multiple myeloma and its associated bone disease.

HONOURS



Dr. Margaret Becklake, Professor Emerita, Respiratory epidemiologist at the MUHC and Researcher at the MUCH Research Institute, has been appointed **Member of the Order of Canada** for her pioneering work in respiratory medicine and epidemiology, and for her research on the occupational and environmental determinants of lung diseases.



Dr. Chaim Shustik, Professor of Medicine and Oncology, Division of Hematology, has been reappointed to the **Louis Lowenstein Chair in Hematology and Oncology** for a second 5 year-term. This Chair was established in 1990 by Paul Lowenstein in honour of his father, Dr. Louis Lowenstein

(1908 - 1968), a Professor of Medicine at McGill and internationally renowned Hematologist-in-Chief at the RVH. Dr. Shustik's primary area of interest is in the treatment of hematologic malignancies.



Dr. Alan Barkun is this year's recipient of the André-Viallet prize. This honour is awarded by the [Association des gastro-entérologues du Québec](#) (AGEQ) as peer-recognition for an individual's life-long achievements in the broad field of Gastroenterology and Hepatology, and is an acknowledgement of the importance of the awardee's clinical and research work, peer-

community implication, collaboration, and notoriety regionally, nationally and internationally. It is the most prestigious prize awarded by the Association.

Dr. Marina Klein, Assistant Professor in the Divisions of Infectious Diseases and Clinical Epidemiology, has been appointed to the [CIHR HIV/AIDS Research Advisory Committee \(CHARAC\)](#) beginning January 1st, 2008 for a term of 2 years and 5 months. CHARAC is a sub-committee of the Infection and Immunity advisory board tasked with advising CIHR and the Institute of Infection and Immunity on strategic directions for Canadian HIV/AIDS research.

Dr. Jeffrey Wiseman, Assistant Professor in the Division of General Internal Medicine and Director of Undergraduate Teaching, has been selected for the Canadian Association of Medical Education (**CAME**) **Certificate of Merit**. For more information on the award, please consult the CAME website. [More information](#)

WE MADE NEWS



Dr. Jacques How, Associate Professor and Associate Director of the Endocrinology Division, was interviewed on [CTV News](#) in late November regarding the rising incidence of thyroid cancer. This was in conjunction with a commentary that he and Dr. Roger Tabah wrote on this topic in [CMAJ](#).

CIHR funded Pulmonary Embolism Diagnosis Study (PEDS) was published as the leading article in [JAMA](#) the week of December 17th.

Dr. Susan Kahn and the JGH played a major role in the success of this trial.

Dr. Samy Suissa, Professor in the Clinical Epidemiology Division, was cited in [La Presse](#) of January 29th following the publication, in the medical journal [Injury Prevention](#), of his and his colleagues' recent research on the association between road vehicle collisions and recent medical contact in older drivers.

Dr. Christina Haston, Assistant Professor in the Respiratory Division and based at the Meakins-Christie Laboratories, and her colleagues made the cover of the February 1st issue of the [AJRCCM](#) for their article entitled "*Persistent Osteopenia in Adult Cystic Fibrosis Transmembrane Conductance Regulator-deficient Mice*". **Dr. Peter Macklem**, Professor Emeritus, wrote an [editorial](#) entitled "*At Last! A Realistic Animal Model of Severe Asthma*" in the same issue.

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