



WOMEN'S HEALTH
RESEARCH INSTITUTE
Women's health, women's lives

Around the WHRI

A newsletter for the women's health research community Fall 2008

A Note From the Executive Director

Since our founding in 2005, the WHRI has seen remarkable growth in the women's health research we develop, facilitate and help translate into better policy and practice in women's health and health care. We are proud of the many accomplishments we've been part of, right here at BC Women's Hospital & Health Centre (BC Women's) and throughout BC, across Canada and internationally. We're excited by the continuing and emerging accomplishments of our members and research partners and by the potential for our development over the coming years.

As you may know, the WHRI started out with seed funding from the BC Ministry of Health and the Provincial Health Services Authority. We are now able to report that as of July 2008 the WHRI supports studies valued at \$5.5 million in secured grant funding, with over \$3 million more in member funding applications submitted and in progress.

In working collaboratively across all four Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) pillars — Biomedical; Clinical; Health Services and Systems; and Social, Cultural, Environmental and Population Health — we can continue to leverage our efforts to produce BC-led, world-class women's health research.

We welcome this greater collective strength as we pursue our vision of "Leading research: Better health for all women" and our work to provide and share new, evidence-based knowledge.

I am pleased to offer you, our members, potential members, colleagues and supporters, the first newsletter of this new phase. I also extend a personal welcome to visit the WHRI team in our expanded space on the third floor of the Shaughnessy Building at BC Women's Hospital & Health Centre.

And if you haven't already joined the WHRI or our distribution list for information and updates, I ask you to consider doing so now, as an individual researcher, project team, organization, associate, affiliate or supporter. Please contact Dr. Zoë Hodgson, Director, Research at 604-875-2000, ext. 4909 or zhodgson@cw.bc.ca to find out more. Thank you, and hope to see you soon "around the WHRI."

Deborah Money, MD, FRCSC

Dr. Deborah Money is the Executive Director of the Women's Health Research Institute (WHRI) and an Associate Professor in the Department of Obstetrics & Gynaecology at the University of British Columbia (UBC). Her research interests focus on HIV in women and pregnancy; HPV; and general reproductive infectious diseases, including the role of vaginal microbiota in reproductive health.



Deborah Money joins Sarah Morgan-Silvester and representatives of 2008 Ismaili Walk for Women sponsor Choices Markets to show support for women's research.

2008 Successes

- **Drs. Ronald Abrahams, Zoë Hodgson, Patricia Janssen and Susan Harris** received a \$30,000 BC Children's Hospital Telethon Award for their study "Fir Square: An evaluation of rooming-in newborns of mothers with a history of substance use."
- In October 2008, the **Fir Square Combined Care Unit** was presented with an Innovative Services Award of Excellence from British Columbia's Representative for Children and Youth. Established in 2003, this internationally recognized BC Women's program is the first in Canada to care for substance-using women and their substance-exposed newborns in a single unit.
- **Drs. Eliana Castillo, Fred Kozak, John Brunstein and Eva Thomas** received a \$30,000 BC Children's Hospital Telethon Award for their study "Detection of congenital CMV infection in children at the highest risk of developing late onset hearing loss."
- **Drs. Deborah Money, Swee-Han Goh, Sean Hemmingsen, Janet Hill and Julie van Schalkwyk** received a \$35,000 MSFHR Team Planning Award for the study "Collaborative research group for the study of human vaginal microbiota in health and disease."
- **Dr. Eszeter Papp** received a \$50,000 CTN Postdoctoral Fellowship Award for her study "HAART-related mitochondrial toxicity in human placenta."
- **Dr. Jehannine Austin** received a \$300,000 CIHR New Investigator Salary Award for her work in the areas of postpartum mental illness and psychiatric genetic counselling.

A Walk in the Park for Women's Health

Heavy rain didn't drown anyone's enthusiasm on August 24 at the 2008 Ismaili Walk for Women. This year's walk in Stanley Park raised \$295,000, with proceeds proudly directed to the work of the WHRI.

The Ismaili Community of BC partnered with the BC Women's Hospital & Health Centre Foundation to organize this event, which will be conducted annually for three years to raise awareness and funds for the WHRI. The Foundation works to raise funds for BC Women's and the WHRI. For Foundation Board of Directors Chair Sarah Morgan-Silvester, the level of community support and effort shown by the Ismaili Community is crucial to our shared success: "Together, our small steps help produce giant leaps in women's health research."

The research supported by the Ismaili Walk for Women is diverse, and includes investigations into many issues that profoundly affect the health and care of women and girls of all ages throughout BC. As just a few examples, studies now underway will play a role in reducing premature births and the associated risks to both mothers and infants, decreasing unnecessary caesarean sections, preventing mother-to-infant HIV transmission, and in ongoing research to prevent cervical cancer through screening and vaccination programs.



"The support from the walk means even more possibilities for developing and sharing new knowledge to save lives and improve quality of life," adds Deborah Money of the WHRI. For Malik Talib, President of the Ismaili Council of BC, the importance of supporting women's health research is also clear: "The WHRI's pursuit of research to improve the lives of women and their families is very much aligned with the philosophy of the Ismaili Community, which encourages the pursuit of knowledge and scholarship."

You can show your support for women's health research at next year's walk, set to take place in September 2008, as well as anytime throughout the year by contacting the BC Women's Foundation. Please join us in expressing our thanks to the Foundation and to the Ismaili Council of BC and to all of the fundraisers, sponsors, donors, individuals, and families who took part in this year's event. We appreciate your commitment to continuing excellence in research.

WHRI Board Director Dr. John Gilbert (left), Janet Austin (above) and other supporters join Sarah Morgan-Silvester on August 24 to raise funds for women's health research.

Member Focus: Ruth Elwood Martin, MD, FCFP

Participatory Research Leads Women into Healing

(With files from Lorraine Chan, UBC Public Affairs)

As a family physician to incarcerated women, Ruth Elwood Martin longed to find a way to improve health outcomes. In 1994, she began making weekly house calls to patients at the Alouette Correctional Centre for Women (ACCW), the province's main facility for women serving sentences under two years.

In 2005, she had a brainwave: why not ask women in prison to conduct health research by and for themselves? "The results have pointed to the enormous potential these women have to make change within themselves and around them," says Dr. Martin, a clinical professor in UBC's Department of Family Practice and a WHRI member.

"Many are dealing with abuse and violence, homelessness and poverty," she adds, and points out that women in prison also experience a higher incidence of cervical cancer, HIV, hepatitis C, sexually transmitted diseases and other infections. As well, recidivism rates are high, with an estimated 40% of women returning to prison within one year and 70% within two years.

Between 2005 and 2007, more than 200 women at ACCW took part in the 'Women into Healing' project. Participants listed their top concerns, among them addiction, chronic illness, living with disabilities, fetal alcohol syndrome, methadone use, the parole process and parenting skills.

Findings were released in 2008, and the 'Women into Healing' group presented on *Giving Voice to Prison Mothers* at the WHRI's Research Symposium held last spring at UBC.

The women generated useful policy recommendations such as the need to improve first- and second-stage housing for prison leavers. For 78% of survey respondents, homelessness was a factor

contributing to their return to crime. Another major finding was the gap in resources for women exiting prison. Without stable housing or job training, many are thrown back into the chaos and conditions leading to drug use or prostitution.

Overall, the participants found that peer research boosted their self-esteem while honing their life and job skills. "Many reported that it increased their hopes of integrating into society," Dr. Martin says, "As far as I know, this is the only women's prison research project of its kind in the world. We've seen amazing transformations. I feel very honoured and privileged to be a witness and a part of that in a small way."

For Jennifer McMillan, "a hardcore addict for 15 years," the ACCW research project gave her the strength and courage to stop using drugs. "Dr. Martin helped us break the code of silence that's in the prison and on the street," says McMillan. "When you're just released from prison, you're terrified. You feel hopeless and helpless, that you'll just end up doing what you were before. But if you see other women doing well, it really helps."

Although participatory research programs no longer run at the ACCW, McMillan and Martin maintain contact and continue to conduct community-based research involving women prison leavers.

WHRI Addictions Research Unit Manager Amy Salmon, PhD continues to collaborate with the Women into Healing group on her study, *Supporting Mothers and Babies: Health and Social Outcomes of Participants in a Canadian Provincial Prison Mother-Baby Program*.

For more information on 'Women Into Healing' and related research projects, please visit www.familymed.ubc.ca/dph.htm

2008 Dates to Note

Canadian Prison-Academic-Community Health and Education Conference

The WHRI is a sponsor of this inaugural collaborative conference, which aims "to encourage and facilitate collaborative opportunities for enhancing health, education, research, service and advocacy for the social well-being and (re)integration of individuals in custody, their families and communities."

Organized by Ruth Elwood Martin of the UBC Division of Prison Health and Education, SFU and the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology, the conference will take place **December 4-5, 2008** at Sty-Wet-An, UBC First Nations Longhouse. For more information and to register, visit www.familymed.ubc.ca/dph.htm.

WHRI Open House

The WHRI invites you to a seasonal open house on Wednesday, **December 10, 2008**, from 5:00 to 7:00 pm. Come see our expanded space, find out about what's new around the WHRI and network with your colleagues in women's health research and practice.

Please note: The WHRI's new reception area is B325B, on the third floor of the Shaughnessy Building in the BC Women's Hospital & Health Centre.

Searchable Online Database Goes Live

The WHRI, in partnership with the Women's Health Research Network (WHRN), has developed a searchable database of researchers and trainees. Unlike the MSFHR Directory and similar databases, this new compilation is not limited to researchers with a Common CV (which requires formal institutional affiliation).

The new database will help researchers and students find potential collaborators, connect with potential mentors/supervisors/students and create greater research opportunities across the province. It will also highlight current women's health research in BC and will be a valuable tool for collaborations and knowledge translation efforts provincially, nationally and internationally.

Over the next few weeks, you may receive an email about your profile. We are asking that you have a look, verify the content and reply to the email sender with any changes, deletions or additions.

The database will be accessible through the WHRI and WHRN websites (www.whri.org or www.whrn.ca). We appreciate your participation in this project and are proud to offer this additional resource to support women's health research and researchers.

Research Focus: Infectious Diseases

Exploring the HPV Vaccine in Girls and Women with HIV

(from ResearchAbility, the new Provincial Health Services Authority e-newsletter on research around PHSA agencies. To subscribe to ResearchAbility, please email editor kevin.noel@telus.net)

"Both of these issues—HPV and its link to cancer, HIV and its link to AIDS — are enormous problems in global health."

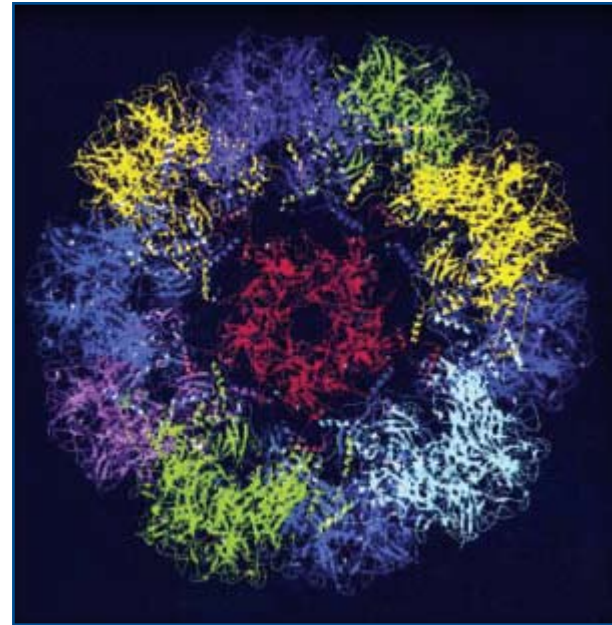
Kevin de Cock, Director, World Health Organization Department of HIV/AIDS on the occasion of the 2008 Nobel Prize in medicine shared by Harald zur Hausen, Françoise Barré-Sinoussi and Luc Montagnier.

Women who are HIV-positive have higher rates of Human Papillomavirus (HPV) infection and their infection progresses to cervical cancer more quickly than for other women with HPV. Although the HPV vaccine has been approved for use in Canada since 2006, it has not been studied in women with HIV. As a result, virtually nothing is known about its effect for these women.

This is an important issue for the approximately 12,000 Canadian women living with HIV. But it is an even greater concern for women in areas of Africa, where up to 20 percent of the population lives with HIV and where cervical cancer is a leading cause of death for women.

"We need to know if this vaccine is safe and if it works for women with HIV," says the WHRI's Dr. Deborah Money, who is leading a collaborative study of the vaccine funded by a \$1.3 million CIHR Operating Grant awarded in the spring of 2008:

"People with the advanced stage of HIV don't necessarily react normally to vaccines and sometimes need additional dosing. By investigating the nature of the immune response among immune-compromised women, we hope to better understand the



subtleties of how the vaccine works and how to make it work best."

In addition to the WHRI, the multi-disciplinary team includes researchers from a number of PHSA bodies, including the Child & Family Research Institute, the BC Centre for Disease Control and the BC Cancer Agency. The study, which begins subject recruitment in November 2008, will eventually involve 500 women and girls with HIV from 16 sites across Canada, with findings available in 2011.

For Money and other members of the HPV in Women with HIV team, determining the effectiveness of HPV vaccination in the female HIV-positive population is crucial. HIV-infected women are the most vulnerable to HPV-related morbidity and cervical cancer mortality, both in Canada and worldwide.

Chatter Around the HPV Vaccine: An Update on BC Women's Knowledge, Attitudes and Beliefs

Principal Investigator: Lisa Venables, RN, BSc, MSN

The discovery of the known association of the Human Papillomavirus (HPV) to cervical cancer and the development and release of the HPV vaccine has changed how we view these conditions and treatments. Research to date on attitudes and beliefs about HPV, Pap screening and cervical cancer was conducted prior to the release of the vaccine and before the resulting public education programs, media attention and popular debate.

"The deluge of attention surrounding HPV and the vaccine has resulted in widespread 'chatter' among the general public, health care professionals, the media, lay journalists, politicians, religious leaders and others," says Lisa Venables, Project Manager, HPV Vaccine in HIV at the WHRI, study coordinating centre.

Venables' study aims to describe women's current knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs around HPV and intent to have Pap screens in light of this recent "chatter." "It's an opportunity to examine concepts from a BC perspective and include women from high-risk groups. Since we started this summer, questionnaires have been collected from women of South Asian, Chinese and European descent in the Lower Mainland. Data still needs to be collected on women participating in a vaccine trial and from northern, rural and Aboriginal women."

In 2009, a cross-sectional cohort of 200 women 26 and older will be recruited with stratified sampling from Greater Vancouver, Richmond, Surrey and the Prince George area. Information obtained will provide health care educators, professionals, policy makers and communities with crucial insight into issues affecting educational and implementation programs.



BC HPV Vaccine Planning Team Recognized for Excellence

Team Lead: Gina Ogilvie MD MSc CCFP, FCFP; Assistant Professor, UBC; Associate Director, Division of STI/HIV Prevention and Control; BC Centre for Disease Control; WHRI Member

The UBC College of Health Disciplines recently awarded Honourable Mention in Inter-professional Teamwork to the BC HPV Vaccine Planning Team for its achievements, noting in part:

"Planning for the implementation of the Human Papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine for BC began in 2005, with an inter-professional team of researchers, clinicians and administrators from several agencies of the PHSA and UBC partners. Team members included epidemiologists, nurses, mathematical modelers, pharmacists, laboratory scientists and geneticists, along with a variety of physician specialists.

Together, they worked to design and generate relevant provincial-level data and prepared evidence-based recommendations regarding the attributes of a variety of strategies to help guide the BC Ministry of Health and Health Authorities in their implementation of this groundbreaking vaccine. This team's work has contributed directly to the effective delivery of one of the most important advancements in young women's health in recent years."

Look for more information on the newly formed and WHRI-coordinated BC HPV Research Group, with 47 members representing a wide range of research perspectives and projects throughout BC in the next issue of Around the WHRI.

2009 Dates to Note

CFRI-WHRI-MHAS Research Assembly

The Oak Street Campus Research Assembly, with participation from Child & Family, Women's Health and Mental Health & Addictions Services representatives will take place on Monday, **January 26, 2009**. This free event will take place from 4:30 – 6:00 pm in the Chan Centre for Family Health Education at the CFRI. For more information, visit www.cfri.ca

Women's Mental Health + Addictions Education Night

Members of the public, researchers, practitioners and educators are invited to a free event on Monday, **January 26, 2009**, 6:00– 8:00 pm, at UBC Robson Square Theatre – C300.

Co-presented by the WHRI Mental Health and Addictions Group and Erin Michalak, Director, Collaborative Research Team to Study Psychosocial Issues in Bipolar Disorder (CREST.BD).

The evening will focus on key issues affecting the mental health of women in BC and share new research findings on treatments and self-management techniques for conditions such as depression and bipolar disorder.

For more information or if you are interested in attending, please contact Zoë Hodgson: zhodgson@cw.bc.ca

Research Support Focus

Good News for Acute Perinatal Program (APP) Research

Erin MacRae, MBT, formerly with the Southern Alberta Cancer Research Institute and the Tom Baker Cancer Centre in Calgary, has started in a new role to support the planning and coordination of research studies within the Acute Perinatal Program (APP) at BC Women's.

Developed jointly by the CFRI and the WHRI, this new position is aimed at streamlining patient-approach research processes and improving communications among the different units of this very busy area. As APP Research Coordinator, Erin is responsible for providing administrative research support to research teams, informing investigators of the clinical progress of studies and study subjects, assisting with budget development and keeping APP staff up-to-date with research activities.

She is also the new contact person for all research studies in APP, the central control for all biological specimens collected, and is responsible for monitoring the impact of multiple research studies, tracking and prioritizing studies and determining APP capacity for research. Any researcher whose work involves the APP is asked to contact Erin at AB321, 604-875-2000, ext. 4875 or emacrae@cw.bc.ca.

Look for more information on other new faces and how they can support you and your research team in future issues of Around the WHRI.

For assistance with funding opportunities, infrastructure support and member services, please continue to contact Zoë Hodgson, WHRI Director, Research: B324A, 604-875-2424, ext. 4909, zhodgson@cw.bc.ca.

Also new to the WHRI Operational Team:

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Vision

Leading research: Better
health for all women.

Mission

To create and facilitate new
knowledge and evidence-
based solutions that inform
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health care of all women.

Core Values

- To be *ethical* in our actions.
- To be *transparent* in our activities.
- To encourage *women-centred* research and innovative thinking.
- To be *inclusive* of everyone and every idea.
- To promote *equality* among everyone, every day.
- To demonstrate *excellence* in all we do.