

June 21, 2018

NEWS RELEASE

Alberta Transplant Innovation Fund Invests to Improve the Lives of Vulnerable Albertans

The University Hospital Foundation and Alberta Economic Development and Trade today announced the second recipients of funding through the Alberta Transplant Innovation Fund (ATIF). The funded projects represent the most impactful research underway to improve the lives of some of the most vulnerable Albertans – those waiting for organ transplantation.

This includes the work of Dr. Puneeta Tandon, who is developing a personalized, online program to improve health outcomes for patients awaiting liver transplantation.

“We know that physical frailty is one of the most important contributors to morbidity and mortality in our patients, and proper nutrition and exercise are essential to maintain health while patients are waiting to receive a life-saving transplant,” explains Dr. Tandon.

“Many patients don’t live close enough to a large center to be able to receive specialized, structured programming. Building off work we have already done, through this research I am working with a team of patients, dietitians and exercise specialists to design exercise videos tailored to patients who are waiting for a liver transplant.

“The program will be personalized and allow for ongoing interaction with a dietitian and exercise specialist team, to keep up motivation. We need to give all of our patients the tools they need so they are healthy enough to accept a transplant.”

Dr. Tandon’s work was ranked number one in the Canadian National Transplant Research Program’s (CNTRP) 2017 Research Innovation Grant competition, through which the ATIF grants were reviewed. ATIF invested an additional \$120,000 in the CNTRP grant competition to increase the investment in transplant focused research based in Alberta. Of the top five ranked research projects in the national competition, four were from Alberta researchers.

Dr. Tandon and the other grant recipients are reflective of the strength of the University of Alberta Hospital’s transplant program – which is home to the most comprehensive organ and tissue donation centre in Canada; and rated sixth in the world by the Center for World University Rankings.

“The University Hospital Foundation has proudly supported the University of Alberta Hospital’s transplant program for five decades; investing over \$6 million to advance transplant patient care, research and technology,” says Jim Brown, Chair of the University Hospital Foundation. “The Alberta Transplant Innovation Fund further develops that support – as is evident in the tremendous research that will be funded through this partnership with Astellas and Alberta Economic Development and Trade.”

As well as caring for patients with chronic conditions through their transplant – and providing world class care following their lifesaving procedures – the hospital is a leader in research through the Canadian National Transplant Research Program, led by Dr. Lori West at the University of Alberta.

“As part of the national structure of the CNTRP, these five Alberta projects are now linked with patients and investigators from across disciplines and centres that will help increase and strengthen the impact of their research,” says Dr. Lori West, Scientific Director of the CNTRP and Director of the Alberta Transplant Institute. “Alberta provides significant leadership in the field of donation and transplant research and we have had tremendous success uniting expertise across the country to increase access to donation and improve outcomes for patients living with a transplant.”

In October, 2016 the \$1.2 million dollar Alberta Transplant Innovation Fund (ATIF) was established to fund research aimed at improving the care available to transplant patients, and accelerating the translation of this research into technology that is commercially viable - and therefore available to clinicians and patients.

“Alberta researchers are making our province proud – attracting international attention and investment at the same time as saving lives,” says Deron Bilous, Minister of Economic Trade & Development. “That’s why we’re helping scientists like Dr. Tandon create new products and programs that mean a healthier province and an unmatched life sciences sector that helps diversify our economy.”

Alberta has historically faced low donor rates, and a high need for transplantable organs. In 2017-18, 361 organ transplant were performed at the University of Alberta Hospital, Alberta Health Services’ centre for organ transplantation in Northern Alberta. Meanwhile, 296 patients were waiting for an organ transplant in Edmonton at the end of 2017.

In addition to addressing the need for organs and increasing donation rates, ATIF will provide funding for researchers who seek to advance transplant technologies, improve care for transplant patients, and increase organ donation rates.

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About the University Hospital Foundation

Through philanthropic investment, the University Hospital Foundation accelerates innovation in research and patient care to benefit the millions of Edmontonians, Albertans, and Canadians from a geographic area the size of Western Europe who receive care at the University of Alberta Hospital; and patients around the world who benefit from local research and innovation that is changing the way health care is delivered. Through Public Private Philanthropic Partnerships (P4 model), we bring together the power of industry, the public sector and philanthropic collaborations, to advance and translate Alberta’s innovations into solutions that impact the health of all Albertans. www.GiveToUHF.ca

About Alberta Economic Development and Trade

The Ministry of Alberta Economic Development and Trade focuses on economic growth and diversification by supporting innovation and research; expanding access to capital for small and medium-sized enterprises; promoting trade, investment and market access initiatives; and leading Alberta’s negotiations on trade agreements. Please visit our website at <http://economic.alberta.ca>.

About the Canadian National Transplant Research Program

The Canadian National Transplant Research Program (CNTRP) is a national research initiative designed to increase organ and tissue donation in Canada and enhance the survival and quality of life of Canadians living with a transplant. The CNTRP brings together basic and clinical scientists in organ/tissue donation, solid organ transplantation (SOT) and hematopoietic cell transplantation (HCT) together with health economics, legal and ethics researchers, policy experts and knowledge users to overcome challenges to optimal use of donation and transplantation. Learn more at www.cntrp.ca

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