

News Release

Leading neurobiologist receives Barbara Turnbull Award for contribution to spinal cord research

Research using zebrafish embryos by Dr. Pierre Drapeau, based in Montreal, could help pave the way for spinal cord repair.

ATTENTION: Assignment editors, health, research and science reporters
For immediate release -

MONTREAL (December 1, 2006) – Dr. Pierre Drapeau, a researcher funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) and professor and chairman of Pathology and Cell Biology at the Université de Montréal, has been named the 2006 recipient of the Barbara Turnbull Award for Spinal Cord Research.

The award recognizes Dr. Drapeau's research, which studies the development of the spinal cord in the zebrafish embryo, a leading model for vertebrate development and genetics. Dr. Drapeau has developed a way to effectively replace zebrafish genes by human genes. By doing this he is able to test the effect of human genetic mutations, known to result in diseases of the spinal cord and brain, in an animal model organism. He has recently discovered that signaling between nerve cells is important not only in the mature spinal cord but also from the earliest stages of development, for the growth of specialized nerve cells and their correct assembly in the spinal cord.

"This prize arrives at an opportune time, just as I am setting up my new lab at the Université de Montréal," explains Dr. Drapeau. "It encourages me to open new doors and to remember that people like Ms. Turnbull will one day benefit from the advancements we achieve in laboratories."

The Barbara Turnbull Award for Spinal Cord Research is an annual prize established in 2001 that supports an outstanding researcher, identified through the CIHR's investigator-initiated grants competition, who contributes to the advancement of world-leading spinal cord research conducted in Canada.

"This is the only award in Canada that encourages Canadian health researchers to broaden their specialization while adding momentum to the on-going search for a cure to spinal cord injuries," said Dr. Rémi Quirion, Scientific Director of the CIHR-INMHA. "Dr. Drapeau is an eminent neurobiologist and his work with zebrafish is innovative and pushes us closer to understanding spinal cord growth and repair."

This \$50,000 prize aligns the efforts of three national organizations: The Barbara Turnbull Foundation (BTF), NeuroScience Canada (NSC), and CIHR's Institute of Neurosciences, Mental Health and Addiction (CIHR-INMHA).

"I'm pleased my Foundation has been able to partner with NeuroScience Canada and the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, successfully using CIHR's peer review system to select the most highly ranked candidate in this field in Canada," said Barbara Turnbull.

"NeuroScience Canada is proud to be a partner of the Barbara Turnbull Award for Spinal Cord Research, for a fifth year. These awards highlight the range of expertise and disciplines that are needed to treat, and one day cure, the thousands of Canadians with spinal cord injuries, and the millions more with other central nervous system disorders," said Inez Jabalpurwala, President of NeuroScience Canada.

"We are delighted to support Canada's leading zebrafish neurobiologist in his groundbreaking work. Mr. Drapeau's research could hold the key to the genetic secret that surrounds spinal cord diseases, as well as other major diseases of the human nervous system, such as schizophrenia and autism. We would also like to thank Barbara Turnbull for her untiring efforts to raise awareness about the devastating impact of spinal cord injuries, and the need to accelerate the pace of neuroscience research," added Ms. Jabalpurwala.

Barbara Turnbull is a well known Toronto journalist and research activist who was shot and paralyzed from the neck-down during a convenience store robbery in 1983 when she was 18. She has helped to co-ordinate this partnership and this award to increase public awareness of the importance of spinal cord research with the hope of helping the many Canadians who suffer from spinal cord and other neurological injuries.

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Ce document est également disponible en français.

Backgrounder

The Barbara Turnbull Foundation

The goal of the Barbara Turnbull Foundation for Spinal Cord Research is to provide recognition and financial support for internationally esteemed research carried out in Canada in the field of neuroscience, particularly as it relates to remediation of spinal cord injuries.

NeuroScience Canada

NeuroScience Canada (NSC) is a national non-profit organization that develops and supports collaborative, multidisciplinary, multi-institutional research across the neurosciences. Through partnering with the public, private and voluntary sectors, NeuroScience Canada connects the knowledge and resources available in this area to accelerate neuroscience research and funding, and maximize the output of Canada's world-class scientists and researchers. www.neurosciencecanada.ca

CIHR-INMHA

The Canadian Institutes of Health Research Institute of Neurosciences, Mental Health and Addiction supports research to enhance mental health, neurological health, vision, hearing and cognitive functioning and to reduce the burden of related disorders through prevention strategies, screening, diagnosis, treatment, support systems and palliation. Associated research will advance our understanding of human thought, emotion, behaviour, sensation, perception, learning and memory. www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca

Mount Sinai Hospital

Mount Sinai Hospital is recognized nationally and internationally for its excellence in the provision of compassionate patient care, teaching and research. Its key priority programs are Women's and Infants' Health, Surgical Subspecialties and Oncology, Internal Medicine and Subspecialties, and the Samuel Lunenfeld Research Institute. It is a University of Toronto-affiliated patient care, teaching and research centre.

The Samuel Lunenfeld Research Institute (SLRI)

Established in 1985, the SLRI at Mount Sinai Hospital in Toronto is one of the world's leading centres for biomedical research. The Institute is part of Mount Sinai Hospital, an internationally recognized 440-bed acute care academic health centre affiliated with the University of Toronto. SLRI has 513 research, administrative and support staff, 100,000 square feet of laboratory space and a 25,000-square-foot pre-clinical research lab. For more information about SLRI research, visit www.mshri.on.ca.