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UBC launches initiative with CCFF, CDRD to combat cystic fibrosis

The University of British Columbia, in partnership with the Canadian Cystic Fibrosis Foundation (CCFF) and the Centre for Drug Research and Development (CDRD), today launches the Cystic Fibrosis Technology Initiative (CFTI) to advance Canadian technologies that will help combat cystic fibrosis (CF).

The initiative, supported by a \$750,000 grant from CCFF, will assemble researchers and identify promising discoveries from across Canada to create new medicines for a disease that affects thousands of Canadians. Potential therapies will be assessed, and those selected will then be developed using the facilities and expertise at CDRD, a national Centre of Excellence for Commercialization and Research hosted at UBC.

“The initiative provides a unique opportunity in Canada for researchers to achieve the common goal of rapidly developing cystic fibrosis treatments to improve health in Canada and beyond,” says J.P. Heale, Director of the CFTI and Associate Director at UBC’s Industry Liaison Office. “We will invest further resources in those technologies that emerge with a superior therapeutic profile, moving them closer to the ultimate objective of providing new and better treatments.”

“By applying our infrastructure and expertise to this unique initiative through CDRD’s advanced drug development platform, we hope to accelerate the development of new and innovative therapeutics for the treatment of cystic fibrosis,” says Natalie Dakers, CEO, CDRD.

Cystic fibrosis is a genetic disorder that primarily affects the lungs and the digestive system. Ultimately, most cystic fibrosis deaths are due to lung disease. One in every 3,600 children born in Canada has CF and one in 25 Canadians carries a defective version of the gene responsible for the disease. While comprehensive treatment programs have dramatically extended the lives of people with CF – half of all Canadians with CF are expected to live into their 40s – there is no known cure.

“The Cystic Fibrosis Technology Initiative is an exciting new venture for the Canadian Cystic Fibrosis Foundation,” says Cathleen Morrison, the Foundation’s Chief Executive Officer. “This initiative will serve as an important step in moving Canadian research discoveries closer to clinical use, and will help to accelerate the development of real-life solutions for children and adults with cystic fibrosis.”

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“We’re so excited about this new initiative,” says Leona Pinsky, a volunteer from the Vancouver Chapter of the CCFF. “Since our daughter Rina was born 12 years ago, there has been ground-breaking work being done right here in British Columbia. We’re optimistic that this initiative will help Canadians with cystic fibrosis, like Rina, live a long, full life.”

The CFTI has issued a request for proposals to universities and research institutions across Canada. The deadline for applications is January 28, 2011. Please see www.uilo.ubc.ca for full details.

The Canadian Cystic Fibrosis Foundation is a Canada-wide health charity, with 50 volunteer chapters, that funds cystic fibrosis research and care. 2010 marks the Foundation’s 50th Anniversary, and to continue its track record of excellence, the Foundation is supporting more than 50 research projects which are exploring all aspects of the cystic fibrosis puzzle; from investigating new methods of fighting infection and inflammation in the lungs to finding new therapies that target the basic defect at the cellular level. Beginning February 1, 2011, the Canadian Cystic Fibrosis Foundation will be known as Cystic Fibrosis Canada. For more information, visit www.cysticfibrosis.ca.

The Centre for Drug Research and Development (CDRD) provides drug development expertise and infrastructure to enable researchers from leading academic and health research institutions to advance promising, early-stage drug candidates. CDRD combines its drug development platform with a commercial arm, which licenses technologies from affiliated institutions and establishes working collaborations with other biotech and lifesciences companies. The Government of Canada's Networks of Centres of Excellence program has recognized CDRD as a Centre of Excellence in Commercialization in Research (CECR). For more information, visit www.cdrd.ca.

The University of British Columbia (UBC) is one of Canada’s largest and most prestigious public research and teaching institutions, and one of only two Canadian institutions to be consistently ranked among the world’s 40 best universities. Surrounded by the beauty of the Canadian West, it is a place that inspires bold, new ways of thinking that have helped make it a national leader in areas as diverse as community service learning, sustainability and research commercialization. UBC attracts \$550 million per year in research funding from government, non-profit organizations and industry through 7,000 grants. For more information, visit: www.ubc.ca.