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Competition for CIHR Funding Grows

Canadian Institutes of Health Research awards Sunnybrook scientists \$2.6 million

By Jim Oldfield
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The Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) has awarded eight grants totaling \$2.6 million to scientists at Sunnybrook Research Institute (SRI). The awards come after the most competitive round of CIHR operating grant applications ever, in which the agency received a record 1,833 applications.

"The competition for operating dollars is increasingly intense," says Michael Julius, vice-president of research at Sunnybrook. "Recruitment and retention of world-class researchers in Canada is really driving this competition. Our researchers need to be exemplary, and they are."

Compared with CIHR's first competition in 2000, this round drew 537 more applications. Of those, 374 were biomedical; this area experienced the largest increase. Population health showed the second-fastest growth with an increase of 121 applications from 2000.

[Jorge Filmus](#), senior scientist in the discipline of molecular and cellular biology at SRI and professor of Medical Biophysics at the University of Toronto, was successful in this latest grant round but says, "There are very good scientists who are not getting grants, and I'm concerned that this could discourage young people from studying science."

Study will look at rare Simpson Golabi Behmel Syndrome

Filmus will receive \$361,866 over three years to study the role of the glypican-3 gene in Simpson Golabi Behmel Syndrome (SGBS), a rare disorder with no treatment that leads to developmental abnormalities, overgrowth and a predisposition to cancer. "If we understand how the glypican-3 molecule works," he says, "We may eventually be able to treat patients with SGBS, and also exploit that understanding to improve the treatment of nonhereditary cancers in which glypican-3 also plays a role, and that are much more frequent than those occurring in this relatively small population."

Research at SWRI focuses on discovery and its translation into the clinic, a focus reflected in the scope of projects CIHR will fund with grants over two to five years. [Juan Carlos Zúñiga-Pflücker](#) will receive \$653,220 to study T cell development in the immune system; [David Spaner](#) will get \$341,325 for basic leukemia research and [Burton Yang](#) will receive \$333,207 to investigate the biology of vascular disease.

[Anthony Feinstein](#) secured \$139,262 for a translational study looking at genetic and neuroimaging predictors of cognitive dysfunction in multiple sclerosis, and Steven Narod will receive \$350,475 for his clinical project, A genetic study of esophageal cancer in Iran. Rounding out the funding are Kevin Imrie, awarded \$176,940 for a feasibility study of chemotherapy and antiretroviral therapy to manage AIDS-related lymphoma; and

[David Alter](#), awarded \$264,375 to evaluate cardiovascular health services and outcomes.

The eight projects at SRI join 24 other grants awarded to the University of Toronto and its affiliated research institutes in this CIHR competition, which sees the dedication of \$203 million for research operating funds over the next five years.