

## **AllerGen Awards \$250,000 Emerging Clinician-Scientist Research Fellowship Award**

*Combating the shortage of allergy and clinical immunology clinician-scientists in Canada*

*For Immediate Release*

**Hamilton, ON (January 8, 2013)** - AllerGen NCE Inc., the Allergy, Genes and Environment Network (AllerGen), a national research network funded by Government of Canada through the Networks of Centres of Excellence program, is pleased to announce that **Dr. Philippe Bégin**, from the Centre hospitalier de l'Université de Montréal (CHUM) and the Centre hospitalier universitaire Sainte-Justine (CHU Sainte-Justine) in Montreal, Quebec, has been awarded the prestigious **AllerGen Emerging Clinician-Scientist Research Fellowship** Award.

Valued at \$250,000, this award is an innovative solution to the critical shortage of allergy and clinical immunology expertise in Canada and the need to enable newly trained Canadian Clinical Immunologists and Allergists to pursue allergy, asthma and anaphylaxis academic research training.

Dr. Bégin's fellowship showcases an international collaboration between AllerGen, CHU Sainte-Justine and Stanford University in California. During the two year fellowship, Dr. Bégin will perform clinical and fundamental research on oral immunotherapy for patients suffering from food allergy under the co-supervision of Dr. Elie Haddad, Chief of Immunology, CHU Sainte-Justine and Professor at Université de Montréal, and Dr. Kari Nadeau, Director of the Stanford Alliance for Food Allergy Research (SAFAR) and Associate Professor at Stanford University.

"AllerGen is pleased to support the research training of Dr. Bégin on his path to becoming an independent clinician-scientist in the field of allergy and immunology," states AllerGen Scientific Director and CEO, Dr. Judah A. Denburg. "I am optimistic that Dr. Bégin's research and collaborations between the CHU Sainte-Justine, and Stanford University will lead to the advancement of novel new treatments and techniques related to food allergies."

The current standard of care in the management of food allergy is dietary avoidance and education of the patient/family in the acute management of an allergic reaction. The burden of avoidance and constant fear of accidental exposure negatively impact the health-related quality of life for both patients and their families. Quality of life surveys indicate that families with children with food allergies face several significant issues including: food preparation, social activities, finding appropriate childcare, school attendance, and an increased level of stress among other things. Hence, there are clearly unmet clinical and social needs in the treatment of food allergy.

Oral food immunotherapy (OIT) is a novel treatment that is currently under investigation and has drawn the attention of the allergy-related scientific community. “Preliminary studies have shown that OIT effectively desensitizes patients and may even induce permanent food tolerance in some,” explains Dr. Haddad. “Dr. Bégin will be the clinical leader at Stanford for three multi-center OIT trials for patients with peanut and/or multiple food allergies. These phase 1 and 2 clinical trials will be critical to demonstrate the safety and efficacy of OIT before clinicians can begin offering this novel treatment to their patients. Thanks to this award, Dr. Bégin will get to collaborate with international leaders involved in this cutting-edge research and this will afford him the opportunity to become a leader in this field as a clinician-scientist, upon his return to Montreal,” concludes Dr. Haddad.

“On behalf of the Canadian Society of Allergy and Clinical Immunology, I would like to congratulate Dr. Bégin and his mentors on his receipt of this important award. Developing researchers who have the clinical background to answer important research questions in the field of clinical allergy is one of the goals of our society,” states Dr. Paul K. Keith, president of the Canadian Society of Allergy and Clinical Immunology.

Dr. Bégin’s research program will also focus on the immunologic mechanisms underlying successful oral food immunotherapy. “By comparing immunologic changes of patients who successfully attain complete tolerance to those who fail, and to those who develop allergic side-effects, we hope to identify targets for adjuvant therapy that would make OIT safer and more effective, and to personalize treatment,” states Dr. Bégin. “Understanding how food tolerance can be reestablished could also provide hints as to how it was lost in the first place.”

Dr. Bégin completed his Masters during Medical School at the Université de Montréal, working with AllerGen-funded Investigator Dr. Catherine Laprise at the Université du Québec à Chicoutimi on the genetics of asthma and atopy. During his residency in Internal Medicine and sub-specialty training in Allergy and Clinical Immunology at CHUM, Dr. Bégin performed clinical research on food and allergic responses to vaccines with Dr. Anne Des Roches and Dr. Louis Paradis, and was the recipient of the immunodeficiency and immunomodulation fellowship award to work on the immunomodulatory potential of basophils and dendritic cells in the lab of AllerGen-funded Investigators Dr. Guy Delespesse and Dr. Marika Sarfati. Dr. Bégin successfully completed his sub-specialty training in Allergy and Clinical Immunology this fall and is currently pursuing a PhD in biomedical sciences at Université de Montréal.

This is the second *AllerGen Emerging Clinician-Scientist Research Fellowship* awarded by the Network. Dr. Moshe Ben-Shoshan, from McGill University and the Montreal Children’s Hospital, received the inaugural fellowship in 2010.

## **About AllerGen NCE Inc.**

AllerGen's mission is to catalyze and support discovery, development, networking, capacity building, commercialization and knowledge translation that contribute to reducing the morbidity, mortality and socio-economic burden of allergic and related immune diseases.

AllerGen NCE Inc. invests in research and training undertaken by leading Canadian investigators aimed at the generation of new knowledge about the causes, treatment and prevention of allergic disease, asthma and anaphylaxis. AllerGen is a national research network dedicated to improving the quality of life for people suffering from allergic and related immune diseases. AllerGen is funded by Industry Canada through the federal Networks of Centres of Excellence (NCE) Program. The Network is hosted at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario.

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