

## **For immediate release**

### **Allergy and asthma researchers receive prestigious Banting Postdoctoral Fellowships.**

HAMILTON, ON (24 September 2013) – Two early career researchers from the Allergy, Genes and Environment (AllerGen NCE Inc.) Network have been named 2013 Banting Postdoctoral Fellows. The fellowships, each valued at \$70,000 per year for two years, are Canada's most prestigious awards for post-doctoral research.

Drs Meghan Azad from the University of Alberta and Jeremy Hirota from the University of British Columbia are among an elite group of researchers who have been recognized for demonstrated research excellence and leadership in their fields of study.

Named after Sir Frederick Banting, a Canadian physician and researcher credited with the discovery of insulin, the Banting Postdoctoral Fellowship awards are given each year to top-tier postdoctoral researchers to develop their leadership potential and to position them for success as research leaders of tomorrow, positively contributing to Canada's economic, social and research-based growth through a research-intensive career.

The program is jointly administered by Canada's three federal granting agencies: the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council; the Canadian Institutes of Health Research; and the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council.

"Drs Azad and Hirota are exceptional early career scientists who are making substantial contributions to our understanding of the genetic and environmental influences on asthma and allergic diseases," said Dr. Judah Denburg, Scientific Director and CEO of AllerGen NCE Inc.

**Meghan Azad** studies the role of gut bacteria in childhood asthma and allergies. Trillions of intestinal microbes (known as the gut microbiota) are essential for stimulating immune system development. Disruption of the infant gut microbiota is a suspected cause of immune disorders that develop later in childhood, including asthma and allergies. Dr. Azad's research uses information and biological samples from AllerGen's Canadian Healthy Infant Longitudinal Development (CHILD) Study to investigate the impact of antibiotics and environmental factors on infant gut microbiota and the subsequent development of allergic disease.

Dr. Azad holds a PhD in Biochemistry and Medical Genetics from the University of Manitoba. She joined the University of Alberta as a Killam Postdoctoral Fellow in 2011 under the supervision of AllerGen researcher, Dr. Anita Kozyrskyj.

**Jeremy Hirota's** research is focused on understanding the contribution of environmental exposures to asthma development and exacerbations. Dr. Hirota examines how air pollution interacts with airway epithelial cells by collecting samples from subjects, with or without asthma, who have been exposed to diesel exhaust. His research will demonstrate how the body responds to air pollution to influence asthma, provide biological data to support public health

initiatives aimed at protecting vulnerable populations from air pollution, and help to identify new targets for the development of drugs for the treatment of asthma.

Dr. Hirota completed his B.Sc. and PhD at McMaster University specializing in asthma and is now a postdoctoral fellow at the University of British Columbia under the supervision of AllerGen researcher, Dr. Chris Carlsten.

### **About AllerGen NCE**

AllerGen NCE Inc., the Allergy, Genes and Environment Network, (est. 2004), is a national research network dedicated to improving the quality of life for people suffering from allergic and related immune diseases. sFunded by Industry Canada through the federal Networks of Centres of Excellence (NCE) Program, the Network is hosted at McMaster University in Hamilton. Visit [www.allergen-nce.ca](http://www.allergen-nce.ca) for more information.

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