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For Immediate Release

Lawson Health Research Institute to Receive \$1 Million

Funding will Allow Researchers to Explore Solutions to the Isotope Shortage

London, Ontario - Lawson Health Research Institute (Lawson) will receive over \$1 million of the \$5.4 million that the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) and the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC) are providing to support research into medical isotope alternatives.

Last June, the Government of Canada announced a funding competition through CIHR and NSERC in response to the Chalk River shut down and a strain on production of radioactive isotopes used to diagnose diseases including cancer. The Open Grants Alternative Radiopharmaceuticals for Medical Imaging Competition is funding seven projects across Canada, providing \$5.4 million for projects which will seek non-nuclear reactor technology alternatives to address the shortage of Technetium-99m - an isotope commonly used in medical imaging procedures.

Under the leadership of Pamela Zabel, scientists at Lawson will be proceeding with the validation and clinical testing of a new product patented through Lawson's Business Development Office, now a part of WORLDdiscoveries™. The product is a modified Technetium-99m formulation optimized for use in the diagnosis and monitoring of the spread of breast cancer through a medical procedure known as sentinel node imaging.

In this procedure, a lymph node biopsy removes lymph node tissue and is examined under a microscope to determine if cancer has spread from its original site. This will allow for appropriate patient management and will potentially eliminate the need to remove of all the lymph nodes in the area reducing the risk and severity of the biopsy procedure. Lymph node detection is considered clinical priority for use of the Technetium-99m isotope when a shortage occurs. The product typically used for sentinel node imaging and detection is not of optimal size and requires a filtration step that wastes seventy to ninety percent of the radioactivity. The new Technetium-99m formulation that scientists have discovered and patented exhibits optimal size for lymph node detection and does not require filtration.

The funding, along with guidance from Health Canada, will assist in the validation and clinical testing of this product as a safe and efficacious product for Canadian cancer patients. The product may also eventually prove useful as an alternative to other Technetium-99m formulations used in other clinical procedures including liver, spleen and bone marrow imaging. Pamela Zabel, scientist at Lawson and assistant professor of Medical Imaging at the Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry at The University of Western Ontario and Muriel Brackstone,

scientist at Lawson and assistant professor of Oncology at Schulich Medicine & Dentistry will receive \$541,339 over two years for their project, "Seventy-to-Ninety Percent Reduction of Tc-99m Required for Breast Cancer Lymphoscintigraphy." This work will lead to more efficient use of the isotope Technetium-99m during a shortage and will provide less waste for breast cancer and other imaging procedures.

"CIHR is pleased to support researchers Zabel and Brackstone as well as all the other successful applicants," said Dr. Morag Park, Scientific Director for the Institute of Cancer Research, part of CIHR. "Pursuing discovery in this area will ensure that Canadians can receive timely cancer screening and treatment services into the future."

Other projects that Lawson researchers are successfully involved with include the BC Cancer Agency and TRUIMF, and The University of Ottawa Heart Institute.

Lawson scientist, Mike Kovacs will work with the BC Cancer Agency and TRUIMF, receiving \$1.3 million over two years for the project entitled, "Cyclotron-based production of Technetium radioisotopes". This project will determine if medical isotopes produced from cyclotrons are a viable alternative to isotopes produced by nuclear reactors.

Lawson scientist, Gerry Wisenberg will work with The University of Ottawa Heart Institute, receiving \$1.1 million over two years for the project entitled, "Rubidium-82 - An Alternative Radiopharmaceutical for Myocardial Imaging (Rb-ARMI)". This project will develop and test new radioactive tracers for their use in diagnosing heart disease. It will help to fast track production and distribution quickly across Canada.

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About Lawson Health Research Institute

As the research institute of London Health Sciences Centre and St. Joseph's Health Care, London, and working in partnership with The University of Western Ontario, Lawson Health Research Institute is committed to furthering scientific knowledge to advance health care around the world.



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About The Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR)

CIHR is the Government of Canada's agency for health research. CIHR's mission is to create new scientific knowledge and to enable its translation into improved health, more effective health services and products, and a strengthened Canadian health-care system. Composed of 13 Institutes, CIHR provides leadership and support to nearly 13,000 health researchers and trainees across Canada.

About Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC)

NSERC aims to make Canada a country of discoverers and innovators for the benefit of all Canadians. The agency supports university students in their advanced studies, promotes and supports discovery research, and fosters innovation by encouraging Canadian companies to participate and invest in postsecondary research projects. NSERC researchers are on the vanguard of science, building on Canada's long tradition of scientific excellence.

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