

BIOCENTURY Innovations

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TRANSLATION IN BRIEF

FUNDING PAN-CANADIAN INNOVATION

The Institute for Research in Immunology and Cancer-Commercialization of Research (IRICoR) in Montreal and the [Centre for Drug Research and Development](#) (CDRD) in Vancouver announced collaborations with three academic groups across British Columbia and Quebec to develop small molecules and identify biomarkers for cancer and neurological diseases. The three new projects the partners announced today are part of an ongoing program funded by [Merck & Co. Inc.](#) to accelerate translation of basic research in Canada.

The projects are the first from IRICoR involving support from CDRD, and come less than six months after IRICoR announced its first project with MaRS Innovations, a technology transfer consortium working to commercialize discoveries from 15 Ontario-based research institutions. (See [“Merck Encycles through Canada.”](#) *BioCentury Innovations* (Dec. 4, 2014)).

IRICoR is the commercialization arm of the University of Montreal’s Institute for Research in Immunology and Cancer (IRIC) technology transfer unit.

“By working together, IRICoR and CDRD are able to leverage their expertise, drug discovery infrastructure and knowledge in order to maximize success in early-stage projects which typically have a high attrition rate,” said Steven Klein, VP of business development at IRICoR.

IRICoR and CDRD worked together to select the three projects, which will each last for about one year.

The first is being led by Katherine Borden, professor of pathology and cell biology at the University of Montreal and principal investigator at IRIC. Her group is working to identify biomarkers and small molecule inhibitors to detect and treat novel forms of therapeutic resistance in cancers.

“Successful commercialization of these projects may also provide IRICoR and CDRD with significant returns on our investment, which will be used to fund additional innovative drug discovery projects.”

Steven Klein, IRICoR

IRICoR and CDRD aren’t disclosing any additional information about the therapeutics or types of cancer they are studying, but Borden’s lab has been researching mechanisms of oncogenic transformation in leukemias.

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The second project, which is also focused on identifying new small molecules for cancer, is specifically targeting [telomerase](#). Lea Harrington, professor of medicine at the University of Montreal and principal investigator at IRIC, and Cory Nislow, professor of pharmaceutical sciences at the [University of British Columbia](#), are leading the project.

Although there is a peptide vaccine, several cancer vaccines and an oligonucleotide against [telomerase](#) on the market or in the clinic, no companies have disclosed clinical-stage small molecule inhibitors of [telomerase](#).

The goal of the last project, led by Daniel Levesque and Claude Rouillard, is to identify new small molecule treatments for dyskinesia caused by two different Parkinson's disease (PD) therapeutics. The specific drugs are undisclosed.

Levesque is professor of pharmacy at the University of Montreal. Rouillard is professor of psychiatry and neuroscience at Laval University.

Klein told BioCentury that the initial funding will mostly come from the Merck fund, but IRICoR and CDRD will contribute additional resources. Merck provided IRICoR with a total of \$C4 million (\$3.30 million) to fund translational research projects in Canada, C\$2 million (\$1.65 million) of which was allocated to the IRICoR and CDRD partnership. The partners will use part of those funds for the three new projects, but exact funding amounts are undisclosed. The partners are looking for additional projects.

Klein told BioCentury that Merck has no rights or options to therapeutics or biomarkers resulting from the projects. IRICoR and CDRD will jointly decide the commercialization paths.

“Successful commercialization of these projects may also provide IRICoR and CDRD with significant returns on our investment, which will be used to fund additional innovative drug discovery projects,” said Klein.

— *Lauren Martz*