

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## **Thunder Bay Regional Research Institute scientists receive \$700,000 Ontario Research Fund grant**

September 25, 2009 *Thunder Bay* – The ultimate goal of molecular imaging scientists working in cancer research is to find and treat tumours that are less than one millimeter in size. The sooner cancer is detected, the greater the chances are of curing it.

Two scientists with the Thunder Bay Regional Research Institute (TBRRI) recently received a \$700,000 grant from the Ontario Research Fund for Research Excellence that will help them in their quest to meet the one-millimeter challenge.

John Rowlands, PhD, Founding Scientific Director for TBRRI and Adjunct Professor, Lakehead University, and Alla Reznik, PhD, TBRRI Scientist and Canada Research Chair in Physics of Molecular Imaging and Assistant Professor, Lakehead University, will use the grant to fund part of a \$2.2 million project involving Positron Emission Tomography (PET) imaging research.

“Current whole-body PET scanners use bulky, expensive components that, while highly effective at detecting many types of disease, can still be improved in terms of image resolution and sensitivity. We are developing a new PET detector that uses advanced solid-state technology that will offer both high sensitivity and higher spatial resolution,” said Dr. Reznik.

“If we are successful, this less expensive, scalable technology could be used for patients in clinical trials. The high spatial resolution means clinicians can better detect very small tumours. This is crucial for the detection of early stages of cancer and, often, for prevention of metastatic cancer,” she added. “As a result, cancer patients could receive an earlier diagnosis and oncologists could better target the disease and plan treatment.”

“I am delighted to offer my sincerest congratulations to Drs Rowlands and Reznik on this remarkable endeavour,” said Michael Gravelle, MPP for Thunder Bay - Superior North. “Through the Ontario Government’s commitment of \$3.2 Billion to Innovations, this technology can be developed right here in our backyard, and will continue to highlight the successes of the Thunder Bay Regional Research Institute on the international stage.”

“I’d like to offer my congratulations to Dr. Rowlands and Dr. Reznik,” said MPP Bill Mauro. “I am excited that our government’s commitment to investment in innovation is once again creating partnerships that are resulting in Thunder Bay, and specifically TBRRI, emerging as a leader in healthcare research.”

Rowlands and Reznik received the grant as part of a \$7.4 million Ontario Preclinical Imaging Consortium, a group comprising of 24 researchers based mainly in Toronto and led by Dr. Stuart Foster of Sunnybrook Research Institute.

“Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre is well-known for its expertise in imaging, and as part of that I include our ability to form strong partnerships with others in the field,” said Dr. Michael Julius, Vice-President of Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre and a Director of the Board for TBRRI. “This grant is further testament to that expertise, and demonstrates that TBRRI is now a major player in molecular imaging.”

“This is yet another example, and one of many more to come, of how partnerships and collaborations lead to success in research. Thinking back five years ago, who would have imagined Thunder Bay would have a molecular imaging research institute within a thriving academic health sciences centre, and be part of one of the most important research consortiums in Ontario? This is truly something for our community to celebrate,” says Michael Power, Chief Executive Officer, TBRRI.

Key facts about the TBRRI:

- The TBRRI is a joint venture partner of the Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre (TBRHSC). Other key partners also include Lakehead University, Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre, Philips Healthcare, Cancer Care Ontario and the Northern Ontario School of Medicine.
- Scientists work under three themes: Advanced Detection Devices, Imaging Guided Interventions, and Probe Development and Biomarker Exploration.
- Research is conducted at both ICR Discoveries (pre-clinical research) and TBRHSC (clinical trials).
- The TBRRI currently employs 50 staff, including 11 institutionally supported scientists. More than 200 people are expected to work within the Institute by 2012.
- TBRRI scientists have secured more than \$2.5 million in grant funding since early 2008.
- TBRRI recently launched a new translational research/clinical trial platform and is now offering early stage patient research studies in PET- CT imaging, MRI imaging and experimental therapeutics in cancer care.

More information on the Ontario Research Fund can be found at [www.mri.gov.on.ca](http://www.mri.gov.on.ca).

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