

News Release

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\$1-million gift to support researchers studying multiple sclerosis

Research program to test new therapies for patients with progressive MS

Researchers studying the progression of multiple sclerosis (MS) at the University of Calgary will be able to investigate new treatment options for the rarest form of the disease, thanks to new community investment.

A \$1 million gift from the Westman Charitable Foundation will support the Multiple Sclerosis Translational Clinical Trials Research Program at the Cumming School of Medicine's Hotchkiss Brain Institute (HBI).

"This gift, coming from highly-respected community leaders and friends of the University of Calgary, will allow the HBI to build on its strengths in brain and mental health, specifically excellence within MS," says President Elizabeth Cannon. "We are proud to partner with Jay Westman and Diana Joseph of the Westman Charitable Foundation, in supporting this key area of research."

Today also marks the launch of the Westman Charitable Foundation, led by Jayman BUILT Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, Jay Westman and his sister Diana. The foundation concentrates on focused giving, offering support to well-defined projects that fall within its four specific areas of interest: health, education, shelter and community engagement.

"The vision of the Westman Charitable Foundation is to build a better tomorrow for Albertans through health, education and shelter," says Diana Joseph - President Westman Charitable Foundation. "We are confident the work of researchers at the University of Calgary will unearth new discoveries in developing treatments for those with one of the most challenging forms of MS. These trials are going to make a tangible impact on those with MS."

About 100,000 Canadians have MS, an inflammatory neurological disorder that damages nerve cells in the brain and spinal cord. Patients can experience any number of symptoms including weakness, tremor, pain, loss of balance and memory.

MS researchers at the HBI seek to improve the lives of the thousands of Albertans affected daily by MS. As a leader in brain health, the HBI seeks to find answers to some of society's most pressing neurological and mental health conditions. The research undertaken by the Multiple Sclerosis Translational Clinical Trials Research Program will enable the investigation of new treatments and therapies for those affected by this debilitating condition that wreaks havoc on the lives of the individuals, many in their 20s and 30s.

Of the four types of MS, few drug therapies exist for those with progressive MS – a course of the condition characterized by a slow accumulation of disability without relapses. It may stabilize for periods of time, but overall there aren't periods of remission.

“Jay and Diana are long-time supporters of MS research and the HBI, and this support is helping to transform lives in Alberta and beyond,” says Samuel Weiss, PhD, HBI director. “Certain forms of MS lend themselves to more treatment options – for patients with progressive MS, few options exist, which will change thanks to this new support. With our team at the forefront of MS research in Canada, we’ll be able to test new treatments with patients who desperately need them.”

Researchers are keenly interested in whether treatments can, over the long-term, repair the damage caused by MS, as well as slow its progression. Key to these discoveries are clinical trials – studying the effects of new treatments in people in both the laboratory and clinical setting.

The Multiple Sclerosis Translational Clinical Trials Research Program will allow researchers to rapidly translate lab findings to a pilot clinical trial and beyond, determining if new medications aid in the treatment of MS. Clinical trials will investigate three drugs, as well as another related to magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) as part of treatment. Patients with progressive MS will be able to take part in trials, undergoing new therapy when they might not otherwise have access to medications for their condition.

Led by the Hotchkiss Brain Institute, [Brain and Mental Health](#) is one of six strategic research themes guiding the University of Calgary toward its Eyes High goals.

About the Westman Charitable Foundation

Through the Westman Charitable Foundation, we have an opportunity to make a lasting difference in our community and to help shape its future. We believe that the strength of a community is directly affected by access to health, education and housing. So we focus our efforts on those projects and partnerships that lead to tangible outcomes in these key areas. The mission of the Westman Charitable Foundation is to strive to improve the well-being of Albertans by investing in health and wellness research, encouraging opportunities for higher learning and helping to improve housing across Canada for those in need. More information about the Westman Charitable Foundation can be found at www.westmanfoundation.ca

About the University of Calgary

The University of Calgary’s Cumming School of Medicine is a leader in health research, with an international reputation for excellence and innovation in health care research and education.

On June 17, 2014, the University Of Calgary Faculty Of Medicine was formally named the Cumming School of Medicine in recognition of Geoffrey Cumming’s generous gift to the university.

For more information, visit cumming.ucalgary.ca/ or follow us on twitter @UCalgaryMed

The Hotchkiss Brain Institute

The Hotchkiss Brain Institute (HBI) at the University of Calgary consists of more than 120 scientists and clinician-scientists who are dedicated to advancing brain and mental health research and education. The Institute’s research strengths, in the areas of Brain & Behaviour, Neural Injury & Repair and Healthy Brain Aging, are leading to new treatments for neurological and psychiatric disorders, aimed at improving quality of life and patient care. More information on the HBI can be found at www.hbi.ucalgary.ca.

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