



BC-CfE Director Dr. Julio Montaner with BC Minister of Health Terry Lake at the LifeSciences BC award ceremony.

BC-CfE Recognized with LifeSciences BC Award for Clinical Research Excellence

Dr. Julio Montaner and members of BC-CfE staff honoured during gala event.

The BC Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS (BC-CfE) was honoured on April 16, 2015, during the 17th Annual LifeSciences BC Awards, for its accomplishments advancing science to treat and prevent HIV and AIDS in British Columbia and around the world. The LifeSciences event, hosted by Bob McDonald of Quirks and Quarks, celebrated the theme of "Growing Community, Collaboration and Value."

"This year's theme of collaboration is fitting in light of the invaluable support the BC-CfE has received throughout the years from community partners and the provincial government," said Dr. Julio Montaner, Director of the BC-CfE. "We are greatly honoured to receive this award and recognition for the advances made in the fight against HIV and AIDS in B.C. As the BC-CfE moves forward in our research on testing, treatment and care, I believe with the continued support of our partners, we can reach an AIDS-free generation here and worldwide."

Dr. Montaner was the key driver in the discovery of highly active antiretroviral therapy (HAART), a game changer in the treatment of HIV. Now the gold standard in care around the world, HAART improves

health and longevity of those living with HIV while dramatically reducing the likelihood of disease transmission. By advocating for the earlier implementation of HAART in order to curb the spread of HIV, Dr. Montaner also pioneered Treatment as Prevention® (TasP®). B.C. is the only province to implement the strategy, and the only one to see a consistent decline in new cases of HIV.

These advances in B.C. play a major role internationally with UNAIDS aiming to eliminate AIDS by 2030 using a strategy based on principles of TasP®. The UNAIDS' 90-90-90 target is 90 per cent of all individuals living with HIV diagnosed, 90 per cent of those diagnosed on sustained treatment, and 90 percent of those on treatment with a suppressed viral load. If this goal is reached, HIV will be transformed from a global epidemic to a low-level endemic disease.

LifeSciences BC is a not-for-profit, non-government, industry association that supports and represents the life sciences community of B.C.

Some of the Clinical Research undertaken at the BC-CfE:

- The design and implementation of randomized controlled trials (RCTs)
- The development of strategies for optimizing the use of investigational and newly available antiretrovirals
- Examining pharmacokinetics of ARV drugs, studying the complex interactions among antiretrovirals and between antiretrovirals and co-administered drugs
- Studying the treatment and complications of HCV and HBV co-infections
- Undertaking observational studies of HIV related immune reconstitution syndromes
- The surveillance of side effects and toxicities of investigational and newly available antiretrovirals



» Meeting the 90-90-90 target would maximize the effectiveness of existing tools in order to virtually eliminate progression to AIDS, premature death and HIV transmission by 2020, and thereby transform the HIV/AIDS pandemic into a low level sporadic endemic by 2030.

— Ryan Meili, expert advisor with EvidenceNetwork.ca



Irene Day, Director of Operations, BC-CfE

From humble beginnings in Cape Breton, hard work and perseverance helped land the job of her dreams

» Born and raised in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, Irene Day, Director of Operations at the BC Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS, grew up in a large Irish/Scottish family, which included her parents, ten siblings and children the family cared for. Space might have been at a premium in the household, but there was never a shortage of chores, laughter and love.

The seeds of philanthropy were sewn at an early age in the Day children, whom Irene adds “never missed a day of mass.” She explained, “My parents were hard working and very philanthropic, instilling in us the importance of community and giving back. Canvassing on behalf of different charitable organizations alongside my mother was commonplace for us. I have always felt a need to be of service to others.”

Irene clearly recalls the fateful day during a car ride with her father shortly after completing grade seven, which she credits for inspiring her academic path. On their way to a family friend’s ordainment in the town of Antigonish, her father pointed to a university as they drove passed and said, “That’s St. Francis Xavier where you’ll go one day.” At a time when funds were limited, this single gesture filled her with excitement, laying the groundwork for her dream of attending university. “Besides my parents and family, I feel blessed to have met some very strong and supportive women and men in my life who always encouraged me throughout my academic, nursing and professional career.” Happily married to husband Bob, she has called Vancouver home for nearly 30 years.

Irene joined the BC-CfE team as Director of Operations in 2005. The self-proclaimed workaholic is unabashedly devoted to her work and the first to admit it also runs in the family. “There isn’t a day that goes by I am not excited to come to work. The leadership and clear focus of our director, Dr. Julio Montaner, and the accomplishment and support of all the BC-CfE staff, really contribute to an environment that is both demanding and hugely rewarding. It’s really an amazing place to work. Knowing you are part of a team at the forefront of research in HIV/AIDS and helping to save lives every day is an awesome feeling.”



Irene Day meeting Pope Francis during recent trip to Vatican.

Dr. Montaner, Director of the BC-CfE, recently shared his appreciation of Irene’s work. “I first met Irene some 10 years ago when she interviewed for the position of Director of Operations. I remember vividly being most impressed by her thorough understanding of our work, her enthusiasm regarding the position, and her ability to think strategically regarding future directions. Since then, I have come to realize that my first impressions were confirmed beyond my expectations. Indeed, her commitment and passion for the goals of the Centre are truly unparalleled.” He added, “I also enjoy her sense of humour and her candour, which greatly facilitate our ongoing interactions. Her flexibility and ability to interact with our clients, political leaders, and even senior international figures, with appropriate respect and empathy, represent a rare gift and asset for the Centre.” If you listen closely, you might catch her razor sharp Nova Scotian humour delivered with a dash of unmistakable Cape Breton edge.

“I cannot tell you how it warms my heart to hear from friends, patients, AIDS service organizations, and BC-CfE supporters,” she shared. “For example, our friends Darren Lauscher and Marcie Summers of the Pacific AIDS Network recently sent a most thoughtful letter congratulating Dr. Montaner following his nomination as Officer of the Order of Canada. It is so good to receive this kind of support from our partners and reinforces that the BC-CfE is on the right path. (To read the letter, go to bit.ly/PANletter)”

STUDY

Treatment Mitigates Accelerated Aging among those Living with HIV: Study

» A BC-CfE study, published in PLOS-ONE, finds the aging process at the cellular level is accelerated in people living with HIV, but this tendency may be decreased with treatment on antiretroviral therapy. The accelerated aging process among those with HIV is associated with age-related illnesses, including more severe cases of emphysema or COPD.

“People with HIV are living longer, healthier lives and this study shows sustained antiretroviral treatment could possibly revert their rate of aging, helping to avert ailments common to aging such as COPD,” said Janice Leung, author of the study and respirologist at St. Paul’s Hospital. “This is another encouraging sign that full access to HIV treatment and care allows people with HIV to experience health outcomes very similar to those who are not HIV positive. Further studies on the impact of antiretroviral therapy on age-related illnesses would be a welcome addition to this field.”

Researchers used as indicators in the study telomere length, the ends of DNA that shorten as cells divide and age. Results showed patients receiving antiretroviral therapy with adequate viral suppression and CD4 cell count normalization had stabilized rates of telomere shortening, similar to non-HIV-infected patients.

“These research findings add to the wealth of data indicating the positive impact of early and sustained treatment for HIV and AIDS with antiretroviral therapy,” said Dr. Julio Montaner, Director of the BC-CfE. “We must continue to provide those living with HIV

immediate access to the most effective treatments, while addressing the additional considerations of an aging population. Treatment as Prevention® – providing facilitated and immediate access to antiretroviral treatment – provides an important roadmap on this path which can eventually lead to the end of HIV and AIDS.”

The PLOS-ONE study findings are in keeping with previous studies demonstrating telomere shortening in HIV, as compared with the general population. However, the study also found that some of the telomere shortening might have occurred prior to study enrolment during periods of severe immunosuppression or acute HIV infection (possibly prior to start of antiretroviral therapy). A history of smoking and the presence of HIV remained significant predictors of shorter absolute telomere length in the final study model.

Participants in the study were derived from a cohort of HIV-infected patients at St. Paul’s Hospital in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. The cohort was assembled as part of a prospective observational study of HIV-associated lung disease with enrolment taking place between August 2009 and June 2013. Not all participants in the study had COPD.



Key dates:

29 April: Late breaker abstract submissions opened

7 May: Registration late fee deadline

8 May: Volunteer applications close

20 May: Late breaker abstract submissions close

The IAS 2015 Conference Programme is shaping up to be one of the strongest ever, and will feature groundbreaking presentations from top investigators around the world covering four conference tracks: Basic Science; Clinical Science; Prevention Science; and Implementation Research.

Key topics will include:

- Exploring promising pathways to an HIV vaccine and cure
- Implementing biomedical interventions such as TasP and PrEP
- Optimizing outcomes along the HIV care continuum including progress towards achieving the 90-90-90 global HIV targets
- Confronting the dual challenges of HIV co-infections and co-morbidities.

For more information and to register, visit:

www.ias2015.org

To follow IAS 2015 on social media:

Facebook: fb.me/IASConference

Twitter: @IAS_conference; #IAS2015

Linked In: “IAS 2015 Conference”

Youtube: “IAS 2015-Welcome words from the co-chairs”

LECTURES & EVENTS

St. Paul’s Addiction Research Day

Come see some of St. Paul’s brightest addiction medicine and research trainees present their latest work!

Stay tuned to bit.ly/addictionmed for further information.

Wednesday, May 27, 2015, 12–5:30PM

Location TBD, St. Paul’s Hospital

What’s New in Addiction Medicine?

Mindfulness & Addiction

Speaker: Dr. Mohit Singh, Clinical Fellow, St. Paul’s Goldcorp Addiction Medicine Fellowship

Tuesday, May 26, 2015, 12–1PM

Hurlburt Auditorium, St. Paul’s Hospital

For more information, contact us at

uhri-list@cfenet.ubc.ca or visit our website at bit.ly/addictionmed

BC Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS

- > Improve the health of British Columbians with HIV through comprehensive research and treatment programs;
- > Develop cost-effective research and therapeutic protocols;
- > Provide educational support programs to health-care professionals;
- > Monitor the impact of HIV/AIDS on B.C. and conduct analyses of the effectiveness of HIV-related programs.

Physician Drug Hotline

1.800.665.7677

St. Paul’s Hospital Pharmacy Hotline

1.888.511.6222

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