
MaRS Innovation

CIHR Commercialization Program funds insulin-alternative stem cell technology and nicotine addiction drug therapy

Two gold-standard grants validate MaRS Innovation's approach

TORONTO (March 2, 2010) – MaRS Innovation is delighted to announce that two of its commercialization projects – notably an umbilical cord stem cell technology from Mount Sinai Hospital and nicotine addiction therapy from the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) - have received Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) Proof of Principle (PoP) funding.

This funding – each grant is valued at \$150,000 – is third party validation of MaRS Innovation's approach to commercializing its members' discoveries. The CIHR performs rigorous due diligence and subjects applicants to a stringent review process on the development and commercialization components of a project.

"We are encouraged that two technologies which MaRS Innovation selected for their solid scientific rationale and significant commercial potential are also viewed so positively by such a respected independent third party agency," says Dr. Rafi Hofstein, President and CEO of MaRS Innovation. "The PoP award demonstrates the real commercial potential of these technologies."

Over the past several months, Dr. Ian Rogers, co-inventor and Associate Scientist at the Samuel Lunenfeld Research Institute of Mount Sinai Hospital, has been preparing to complete preclinical studies with this technology in order to aggressively move toward clinical trials for the treatment of diabetes as a next step. Based on feedback received from potential industry partners, the funding from the CIHR PoP Program provides the financial resources for the preclinical studies to significantly add value to this program.

"The great advantage of using stem cells from umbilical cord blood is their abundance worldwide," explains Dr. Rogers. "Transferring this technology to the clinic could mean a feasible alternative to insulin injections for millions of patients worldwide."

The second technology that received PoP funding is a new drug therapy for nicotine addiction developed by Dr. Fang Liu, inventor and scientist at CAMH. Proof of concept data demonstrates that this therapy decreases addictive behavior associated with nicotine in animal models. However, additional preclinical studies, funded by the PoP program, are required to support further drug development.

"Breaking the grip of addiction is one of the great challenges in medicine," Dr. Liu says. "My laboratory has discovered a new drug target that I feel holds great promise in finding a better way to disrupt the addiction circuit in the brain."

With initial commercialization and development funding for these two programs in place, MaRS Innovation is looking to secure additional sources of funding for commercial development of these exciting opportunities. "We look forward to actively working with the scientists and member institutions to drive commercial success for these and other MaRS Innovation selected technologies," adds Dr. Hofstein.

About MaRS Innovation

MaRS Innovation provides an integrated commercialization platform that harnesses the economic potential of the exceptional discovery pipeline of 14 leading Toronto academic institutions. MaRS Innovation is a non-profit organization with an independent industry-led Board of Directors, funded through the Government of Canada's Networks of Centres of Excellence and the contributions of its member institutions.

Designed to enhance the commercial output of Toronto's outstanding scientific research cluster, MaRS Innovation will make a significant contribution to Canada's economic outlook and the quality of life for Canadians and others around the world. MaRS Innovation will advance commercialization through industry partnerships, licensing and company creation. The MaRS Innovation mission is to put Canada on the global innovation stage, by better connecting research with industry and strengthening Canada's competitive capacity in knowledge based businesses - in short, to launch a new generation of robust, high-growth Canadian companies that will become global market leaders.

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