

AllerGen awards \$250,000 for advanced allergy research

Hamilton, ON (5 December 2016) - AllerGen NCE Inc., the Allergy, Genes and Environment Network (AllerGen), a national research network funded by the Government of Canada through the Networks of Centres of Excellence program, is pleased to announce that **Dr. Catherine Biggs** has been awarded the prestigious **AllerGen *Emerging Clinician-Scientist Research Fellowship***.

This is the fourth *Emerging Clinician-Scientist Fellowship* awarded by AllerGen since 2011. Valued at \$250,000 each, these awards have enabled newly trained Canadian allergists and immunologists to advance their research expertise and pursue a combined career as clinicians and academic researchers.

During the two-year Fellowship, Dr. Biggs will train under the supervision and mentorship of AllerGen investigator Dr. Stuart Turvey, a pediatric immunologist and director of clinical research at BC Children's Hospital, and a professor at The University of British Columbia in Vancouver, BC.

"Bringing Dr. Biggs back to Canada with this important AllerGen Fellowship is a big win for the Canadian clinical immunology community," says Dr. Turvey. "Dr. Biggs is now based at Vancouver's BC Children's Hospital, where she cares for children with immune system disorders and performs research to better understand eosinophils—a type of white blood cell involved in asthma and allergic disease."

Dr. Turvey's research team has identified a Canadian family with a rare mutation in the Janus kinase 1 (JAK1) gene that causes severe atopic dermatitis, asthma, and strikingly elevated levels of eosinophils. Working with this family, Dr. Biggs will study the impact of the JAK1 mutation on eosinophil levels and the immune system. Eosinophils destroy invading organisms like viruses, bacteria, or parasites, and promote inflammation—a symptom of asthma and allergies. High eosinophil levels can lead to chronic inflammation resulting in tissue damage.

"Clinician-scientists are uniquely positioned to translate research knowledge into improved patient care and health," comments AllerGen Scientific Director and CEO, Dr. Judah Denburg. "Dr. Biggs' research, which will study rare immune disorders caused by genetic mutations, may lead to a better understanding and treatment of, not only rare disorders such as JAK1, but also many common allergic and immune diseases."

Dr. Biggs completed a pediatrics residency, and a specialty in clinical immunology and allergy at Harvard Medical School and Boston Children's Hospital where she conducted both clinical and basic science research, and used cutting-edge technology based on CRISPR DNA targeting.

“The AllerGen *Emerging Clinician-Scientist Fellowship* will provide invaluable experience on my path towards becoming an independent clinician-scientist committed to improving the lives of patients with allergic and immune disorders,” says Dr. Biggs. “I am extremely grateful for the support of my mentors and the AllerGen Network.”

A legacy partnership with the Canadian Allergy, Asthma and Immunology Foundation (CAAIF) will ensure that AllerGen’s *Emerging Clinician-Scientist Fellowship* award continues to support Canadian innovation and capacity building for years to come. In 2017, the award will become known as the AllerGen-CAAIF *Emerging Clinician-Scientist Research Fellowship*.

About AllerGen NCE Inc.

AllerGen NCE Inc., the Allergy, Genes and Environment Network (est. 2004), is a national research network dedicated to improving the quality of life of people suffering from allergic and related immune diseases. Funded through the federal Networks of Centres of Excellence (NCE) Program, the Network is hosted at McMaster University in Hamilton.

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