A recent AllerGen-supported study has revealed that children from low-income families have less adequate asthma control than children from higher socioeconomic backgrounds.

Dr. Wendy Ungar, Senior Scientist, The Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto and her Program E research team have published a series of papers that describe how inadequate asthma control is associated with lower income, more primary care visits and exposure to asthma triggers.

Ungar’s study Financial barriers to medication use in children with asthma: Effect on health outcomes involved cross-sectional data analysis of a clinical study of 879 asthmatic children between the ages of 1 and 18 residing in the Greater Toronto Area. “We found that only 11% of children met the requirements for acceptable control as defined by the Canadian Pediatric Asthma Consensus Guidelines,” said Ungar. “Children from low-income families tend to have poorer controlled asthma which has been associated with higher total healthcare costs.”

Ungar’s study suggests that children from low income families may have less access to needed medications and spaces or be less likely to adhere to prescribed medication which may contribute to the lower levels of asthma control. “Canadian children definitely don’t control their asthma as well as they should and this may be associated with a difference in socioeconomic or psychosocial factors which must be addressed in vulnerable populations,” said Ungar. Ungar will soon be releasing a report which shows that children whose mothers are homemakers have a better home environment i.e., are exposed to fewer sources of allergens such as stuffed animals, carpeting and pets. "When the mother is at home, there appears to be fewer environmental triggers for children with asthma," Ungar said. “The exposure to tobacco smoke, which is another common trigger, was found to be more common in lower socioeconomic homes.”

Ungar added, "We need to teach parents about triggers and show them how these triggers can be eliminated i.e., by adhering to asthma action plans and removing exposure to sources of dust mites, washing linens, removing stuffed toys and not putting the child’s room in the basement. “To make these issues known and to discuss how we might improve drug benefits for children with asthma, we held a workshop supported by AllerGen, to bring together researchers, physicians, drug plan managers, consumer advocates, asthma nurses, educators and parents.”

Ungar said it was the first time stakeholders with a common interest in pediatric asthma, who wouldn’t usually have the opportunity to talk to each other, could come together to discuss these topics and express different points of view.

“I was fortunate enough,” she said, “to have had an AllerGen-supported trainee, Shannon Cope, who immersed herself in this research and had numerous publications from her master's degree; this was a very positive experience for her. "AllerGen has been instrumental in bringing together researchers with common interests. For example, Michael Paterson, Scientist, Institute for Clinical Evaluative Sciences has been a co-investigator on a lot of the work that I’ve done, as has AllerGen’s Anita Kazynski, Associate Professor, Department of Pediatrics, University of Alberta,” Ungar said.

Coming from a health economics background, Ungar has delved into the financial impact of asthma on society. She recently edited a book which will be published shortly by Oxford University Press called Economic Evaluation in Child Health. This will be the first English language text book with a focus on pediatric economic evaluation and includes a chapter on asthma.

With more projects in the pipeline, Ungar hopes to continue to understand the differences in asthma control resulting from income levels and/or socioeconomic status so that she can develop recommendations that influence policy makers, physicians and drug plan managers as well as educate asthma sufferers and their family members, leading to better health and healthcare for Canadians.
Mind-Body Interactions and Allergic Disease Team Identifies 
Strategic Research Opportunities 2009-2012

Numerous strategic opportunities were identified by workshop participants in mind-body research related to health and allergic diseases. These opportunities fell into four categories of research - biomarkers, epigenetic analysis, interventional studies, and the development of a national- and multidisciplinary program of integrating societal and biologic interventions and stress studies leading to policy and therapeutic outcomes for allergic and related immune disorders.

NCE research programs distinguished themselves from those supported by the national research granting councils by virtue of their interdependent, networked research teams working across disciplines and institutions, and in partnership with potential end-users of the research results. Ideally, NCE researchers work in virtual teams on complex problems that would not and could not be addressed by individual researchers working alone. These research teams are funded to be transformational agents of innovation that develop, protect, translate and apply knowledge for economic and/or social benefit to Canada.

Workshop participants recommended that AllerGen Mind-Body Interactions and Allergic Disease researchers develop research proposals for 2009-2012, of which the majority are short-term deliverables and impacts on user sectors over the next three years. An additional recommendation was that there should be extensive planning to develop a research program that will take AllerGen’s Mind-Body research to the next level.

AllerGen Mind-Body researchers will reconvene at the AllerGen annual conference to develop high impact, interventional research foci to 2012, as well as to initiate planning to develop a transformational, multidisciplinary and nationally-networked research program to 2019.

Policy, Ethics, Law and Society (PELS) Advisory Committee

The AllerGen Policy, Ethics, Law and Society (PELS) Advisory Committee held its inaugural meeting on January 12, 2009 in Toronto.

The need for a PELS Committee was identified by the Board of Directors and Research Management Committee (RMC) at the December 2007 strategic planning retreat. This Committee will provide advice and support for connecting Network researchers and decision-makers across levels and sectors including government in Canada.

This Committee is chaired by two members of AllerGen’s RMC, Dr. Susan Elliott, Professor, School of Geography and Earth Sciences, McMaster University and Timothy Land, Research Director, Health Law Institute, University of Alberta, Faculty of Law.

PELS Advisory Committee Members include:

- Lisa Cicutto, Associate Professor, Faculty of Medicine, Division of Respiratory, University of Toronto
- Alina Gledinner, Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, McMaster University
- Samuel Godefroy, Director Health Canada, Bureau of Chemical Safety
- Christine Hampshire, President and CEO, The Asthma Society of Canada
- Anthony Levinson, Assistant Professor, Department of Psychiatry & Behavioural Neurosciences, McMaster University
- Diane Lougheed, Associate Professor, Department of Medicine, Queen’s University
- Mark Raizenne, Director General, Public Health Agency of Canada
- Elinor Wilson, President and CEO, Assisted Human Reproduction Canada
- Michelle O’Donaghue, Program Coordinator, AllerGen
- Elinor Wilson, President and CEO, Assisted Human Reproduction Canada

The PELS Committee is a standing advisory committee reporting to AllerGen’s RMC and provides advice and support to the RMC in its:

- Facilitation of the translation of AllerGen research that has clinical, policy, ethical, legal and/or social implications;
- Identification of emerging PELS issues that warrant a policy response for the Canadian allergic and immune disease research community; and
- Establishment of enduring links between AllerGen researchers and Canadian clinicians and policymakers.

To achieve this mandate, the PELS Committee will promote the use of a variety of tools, including workshops, policy papers, consensus meetings and the commissioning of research. With promotion of the public good as the guiding principle, the PELS Committee will seek to ensure that its activities are informed by the best available evidence.

The PELS Committee has a number of new initiatives planned including a workshop that aims to expedite ethics reviews of nationally, networked multi-site research proposals; and the development of two Knowledge Translation (KT) planning tools tailored for AllerGen researchers – one for Biomedical Researchers and the other for Clinical, Health Services and Population/Public Health Researchers. These tools will assist Network Investigators in developing KT plans from the outset of their research projects.

AllerGen’s Strategic Focus 2009-2012

With NCE funding secured to 2012, AllerGen enters into its next three years of NCE support. Between 2009 and 2012 AllerGen seeks to invest in nationally networked research teams demonstrating excellence, productivity and offering unique capacity building opportunities. This next phase of research funding will encourage research that builds on and extends existing immunological and partner investments with potential to accelerate medical and economic impact through application of research results to real world problems and challenges faced by partner organizations, sectors of the Canadian economy and/or society.

AllerGen research priorities include three research foci of strategic importance to the generation of new knowledge with potential to address social and economic impact in the areas of allergic and related immune disease.

1. Programme A – Gene-Environment Interactions

Strategic Focus: Genetics, environmental exposures, and gene-environment interactions in allergy and asthma

2. Programme B – Diagnostics and Therapeutics

Strategic Focus: Biomarkers, immunology (including screening, monitoring and disease development)

3. Programme C – Public Health, Ethics, Policy and Society

Strategic Focus: Allergic disease management and surveillance

In addition, four cross-programmatic, multidisciplinary research thrusts fostered by AllerGen for since 2005 are continuing research investment priorities for 2009-2012:

- Established Cross-programmatic Teams
- The Canadian Healthy Infant Longitudinal Development (CHILD) Study
- Food Allergy and Anaphylaxis Emerging Cross-programmatic Teams
- Mind-Body Interactions and Allergic Disease
- 7. Occupational and Work-related Allergy and Asthma

Funding research projects leading to social and economic benefits for Canadians is a priority of both the NCE program and AllerGen. Knowledge translation is the all-important link between discovery and development and is the bridge between the laboratory and the social and economic benefits that accrue to Canadians from public investment in research.
Mind-Body Interactions and Allergic Disease Team Identifies Strategic Research Opportunities 2009-2012

Numerous strategic opportunities were identified by workshop participants in mind-body research related to health and allergic diseases. These opportunities fell into four categories of research – biomarker, epigenetic, interventional studies, and the development of a national network of multidisciplinary research integrating societal and biologic interventions and stress studies leading to policy and therapeutic outcomes for allergic and related immune disease.

NCE research programs distinguish themselves from those supported by the national research granting councils by virtue of their interdependent, networked research teams working across disciplines and institutions, and in partnership with potential end-users of the research results. Ideally, NCE researchers work in virtual teams on complex problems that would not and could not be addressed by individual researchers working alone. These research teams are funded to be transformational agents of innovation that develop, protect, translate and apply knowledge for economic and social benefit to Canada.

Workshop participants recommended that AllerGen Mind-Body Interactions and Allergic Disease researchers develop research proposals for 2009-2012, of which the majority is short-term and deliverable on user sectors over the next three years. An additional recommendation was that there should be extensive planning to develop a research program that will take AllerGen’s Mind-Body research to the next level.

AllerGen Mind-Body researchers will reconvene at the AllerGen annual conference to develop high impact, interventional research foci to 2012, as well as to initiate planning to develop a transformational, multidisciplinary and nationally-networked research program to 2019.

AllerGen’s Strategic Focus 2009-2012

With NCE funding secured to 2012, AllerGen enters into its next three years of NCE support. Between 2009 and 2012 AllerGen seeks to invest in nationally networked research teams demonstrating excellence, productivity and offering unique capacity building opportunities. This next phase of research funding will encourage research that builds on and extends existing research and economic impact through application of research results to real world problems and challenges faced by partner organizations, sectors of the Canadian economy and/or society.

AllerGen research priorities include three research foci of strategic importance to the generation of new knowledge with potential for social and economic impact in the areas of allergic and related immune disease.

1. Programme A – Gene-Environment Interactions
   - Strategic Focus: Genetics, environmental exposures, and gene-environment interactions in allergy and asthma

2. Programme B – Diagnostics and Therapeutics
   - Strategic Focus: Biomarkers, immune monitoring and drug development

3. Programme C – Public Health, Ethics, Policy and Society
   - Strategic Focus: Allergic disease management and surveillance

In addition, four cross-programmatic, multidisciplinary research thrusts fostered by AllerGen for the years 2009-2012 are continuing research investment priorities.
A recent AllerGen-supported study has revealed that children from low income families have less adequate asthma control than children from higher socioeconomic backgrounds.

Dr. Wendy Ungar, Senior Scientist, The Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto and her Programme C research team have published a series of papers that describe how inadequate asthma control is associated with lower income, more primary care visits and exposure to asthma triggers.

Ungar’s study Financial barriers to medication use in children with asthma: Effect on health outcomes involved cross-sectional data analysis of a clinical study of 879 asthmatic children between the ages of 1 and 18 residing in the Greater Toronto Area. “We found that 11% of children met the requirements for acceptable control as defined by the Canadian Pediatric Asthma Consensus Guidelines,” said Ungar. “Children from low-income families tend to have poorer controlled asthma which has been associated with higher total healthcare costs.”

Ungar’s study suggests that children from low income families may have less access to needed medications and spaces or be less likely to adhere to prescribed medication which may contribute to the lower levels of asthma control. "Canadian children definitely don’t control their asthma as well as they should and this may be associated with a difference in socioeconomic or psychosocial factors which must be addressed in vulnerable populations,” said Ungar. Ungar will soon be releasing a report which shows that children whose mothers are homemakers have a better home environment i.e., are exposed to fewer sources of allergens such as stuffed animals, carpeting and pets. “When the mother is at home, there appears to be fewer environmental triggers for children with asthma,” Ungar said. “The exposure to tobacco smoke, which is another common trigger, was found to be more common in lower socioeconomic homes.”

Ungar added, “We need to teach parents about triggers and show them how these triggers can be eliminated i.e., by adhering to asthma action plans and removing exposure to sources of dust mites, washing linens, removing stuffed toys and not putting the child’s room in the basement. "To make these issues known and to discuss how we might improve drug benefits for children with asthma, we held a workshop supported by AllerGen, to bring together researchers, physicians, drug plan managers, consumer advocates, asthma nurses, educators and parents.”

Ungar said it was the first time stakeholders with a common interest in pediatric asthma, who wouldn’t usually have the opportunity to talk to each other, could come together to discuss these topics and express different points of view.

"I was fortunate enough," she said, “to have had an AllerGen-supported trained, Shannon Cope, who immersed herself in this research and had numerous publications from her master’s degree; this was a very positive experience for her. “AllerGen has been instrumental in bringing together researchers with common interests. For example, Michael Paterson, Scientist, Institute for Clinical Evaluative Sciences has been a co-investigator on a lot of the work that I’ve done, as has AllerGen’s Anita Kayzynski, Associate Professor, Department of Pediatrics, University of Alberta,” Ungar said. Coming from a health economics background, Ungar has delved into the financial impact of asthma on society. She recently edited a book which will be published shortly by Oxford University Press called Economic Evaluation in Child Health. This will be the first English language text book with a focus on pediatric economic evaluation and includes a chapter on asthma. With more projects in the pipeline, Ungar hopes to continue to understand the differences in asthma control resulting from income levels and/or socioeconomic status so that she can develop recommendations that influence policy makers, physicians and drug plan managers as well as educate asthma sufferers and their family members, leading to better health and healthcare for Canadians.

Innovation from cell to society

Under the Microscope with Wendy Ungar

AllerGen’s next conference

Feb 7 – 10, 2010
Fairmont Le Château Frontenac, Quebec City

New innovation from cell to society

Annual Report 2007 - 2008

AllerGen is pleased to announce that its 2007-2008 Annual Report is now available online at www.allergen-nce.ca. AllerGen’s fourth annual report highlights Network accomplishments over the past year across all areas of activity - research, capacity building, networking, partnership development, and knowledge and technology exchange and exploitation.

Innovation from cell to society

AllerGen NCE Inc. Scientific Director and CEO Dr. Judah A. Denburg Managing Director and COO Diana Royce, EdD

All agenda enquiries and comments should be sent to: Sr Communications Officer Jessie Ielati ielati@mcmaster.ca

AllerGen Administrative Centre is located at McMaster University 1200 Main Street West Michael G. DeGroote Centre for Learning and Discovery Room 3120 Hamilton ON L8N 3Z5 (905) 525-9140, ext. 26502

In this issue:

• Request for Proposals
• PELS Advisory Committee
• Mind-Body Workshop
• Two Minds are Better than One
• AllerGen Strategic Focus 2009 to 2012
• Under the Microscope
• Annual Report 2007-2008

Allergen NCE Inc.
Scientific Director and CEO
Dr. Judah A. Denburg
Managing Director and COO
Diana Royce, EdD

All agenda enquiries and comments should be sent to:
Sr Communications Officer
Jessie Ielati
ielati@mcmaster.ca

AllerGen Administrative Centre is located at:
McMaster University
1200 Main Street West
Michael G. DeGroote Centre for Learning and Discovery
Room 3120
Hamilton ON L8N 3Z5
(905) 525-9140, ext. 26502

Under the Microscope with Wendy Ungar

Allergen NCE Inc.
Scientific Director and CEO
Dr. Judah A. Denburg
Managing Director and COO
Diana Royce, EdD

All agenda enquiries and comments should be sent to:
Sr Communications Officer
Jessie Ielati
ielati@mcmaster.ca

AllerGen Administrative Centre is located at:
McMaster University
1200 Main Street West
Michael G. DeGroote Centre for Learning and Discovery
Room 3120
Hamilton ON L8N 3Z5
(905) 525-9140, ext. 26502

In this issue:

• Request for Proposals
• PELS Advisory Committee
• Mind-Body Workshop
• Two Minds are Better than One
• AllerGen Strategic Focus 2009 to 2012
• Under the Microscope
• Annual Report 2007-2008

Allergen NCE Inc.
Scientific Director and CEO
Dr. Judah A. Denburg
Managing Director and COO
Diana Royce, EdD

All agenda enquiries and comments should be sent to:
Sr Communications Officer
Jessie Ielati
ielati@mcmaster.ca

AllerGen Administrative Centre is located at:
McMaster University
1200 Main Street West
Michael G. DeGroote Centre for Learning and Discovery
Room 3120
Hamilton ON L8N 3Z5
(905) 525-9140, ext. 26502

Request for Proposals (RFP) 2009-2012

In February 2009, AllerGen invited proposals for multidisciplinary, networked and partnered programmes of research that it could support to 2012 towards the achievement of its goal of reducing the impact of allergic and related immune diseases nationally and globally.

AllerGen’s Fourth Annual Conference, Innovation from Cell to Society’ in Ottawa February 15-17, 2009 will provide researchers with an opportunity to discuss the RFP process and develop networked, programmatic research proposals during facilitated workshops. These workshops will facilitate networking, promote the establishment of multidisciplinary research teams, and help investigators to identify future research opportunities and priorities in collaboration with partner organizations for the period 2009-2012.

Letters of Intent (LOIs), due on March 15, 2009, will be reviewed by AllerGen’s Research Management Committee (RMC) and members of the AllerGen’s International Scientific Excellence Advisory Committee (ISEAC) in early April 2009 for alignment, priority and fit with the Network’s mandate and strategic goals. Following this review, a limited number of applicants will receive invitations to submit Full Proposals. Full Proposals will be due May 31, 2009, and will be reviewed by the arm’s-length ISEAC in June 2009. Applicants will receive notification of the outcome of the full reviews by mid-July 2009 and successful teams will begin to receive funding instalments August 1, 2009.

Proposals that cut across research programmes are encouraged. A commitment to multidisciplinary research is critical. AllerGen’s overarching research objectives are to:

1. Understand the causes of the allergic epidemic;
2. Facilitate the development of new bio-molecular research-based platforms, tools and processes;
3. Facilitate the development of new products and services for allergic disease and asthma management;
4. Advance professional and lay knowledge about allergic diseases; and
5. Train highly qualified personnel nationally in allergic disease research, knowledge translation and innovation.

Proposals for new, smaller scale, strategic research and knowledge translation and commercialization initiatives arising from Network research investments are welcome at any time throughout the year. Funding for these three types of initiatives is available through separate processes outlined at AllerGen’s website at www.allergen-nce.ca/Research/Funding_Programme.html. Interested parties are encouraged to view the AllerGen website at www.allergen-nce.ca/Research/RFP2009-2012.html and check for alignment of proposed research with currently funded projects and programmatic areas.