



Allergy, Genes and Environment Network
Le réseau des allergies, des gènes et de l'environnement

For immediate release

AllerGen awards \$250,000 for advanced allergy research

HAMILTON, ON (2 October 2014)

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. Marylin Desjardins** has been awarded the prestigious **AllerGen Emerging Clinician-Scientist Research Fellowship**.

With the alarming increase in the prevalence of allergy and immune-related diseases over the past 20 years, especially among children, there is an urgent need to accelerate the development of novel, patient-oriented diagnostic and treatment protocols.

Valued at \$250,000, this fellowship addresses the shortage of allergy and clinical immunology expertise in Canada and advances AllerGen's goal to support Canadian clinical immunologists and allergists in the pursuit of research training and a combined career as a clinician and academic researcher.

Dr. Desjardins will begin her fellowship in January 2015 at the Research Institute at McGill University Health Centre and The Montreal Children's Hospital in Montreal, Quebec. She will train under the supervision and mentorship of AllerGen Principal Investigator Dr. Bruce Mazer, a pediatric allergist and immunologist at the Meakins-Christie Laboratories.

"AllerGen is pleased to support Dr. Desjardins's research training and her goal of becoming an independent clinician-scientist in the field of allergy and immunology," says AllerGen's Scientific Director and CEO, Dr. Judah Denburg. "I am confident that Dr. Desjardins's research will benefit Canadians living with allergies, asthma and immune deficiencies."

Dr. Desjardins's research focuses on interleukin-21 (IL-21), a protein that plays a key role in stimulating the body's immune system and antibody production. A better understanding of how IL-21 works and the role it plays in the development of autoimmune diseases and inflammatory disorders could contribute to new treatment options for individuals with allergies, asthma and immune deficiencies.

Dr. Desjardins's work will also contribute to the development of a safe and effective protocol for the treatment of cow's milk allergy with oral immunotherapy (OIT), as part AllerGen's Canadian Food Allergy Strategic Team (CanFAST) research. Her work will also support GET-FACTS: Genetics, Environment and Therapies: Food Allergy Clinical Tolerance Studies—a project that combines components of population genetics, immunology, clinical medicine and sociocultural analyses to study the nature of food allergies.

"It is a great honour to receive this fellowship. I look forward to commencing my research program and contributing towards AllerGen's efforts to discover the causes of allergic and immune-related diseases in order to improve patient care," says Dr. Desjardins.

Dr. Desjardins completed her medical degree and pediatric specialty training at the Université de Sherbrooke and her residency training in Paediatric Immunology and Allergy at The Montreal Children's Hospital. Dr. Desjardins has worked with Dr. Mazer at the Meakins-Christie Laboratories as a clinical and research Fellow since 2011, and she launched her research program by recruiting a cohort of patients with Common Variable Immunodeficiency (CVID).

This is the third *Emerging Clinician-Scientist Research Fellowship* awarded by the AllerGen network. **Dr. Philippe Bégin**, from the Centre hospitalier de l'Université de Montréal (CHUM) and the Centre hospitalier universitaire Sainte-Justine (CHU Sainte-Justine) in Montreal, Quebec, received the fellowship in 2013. Dr. Bégin's research showcases an international collaboration between Canadian researchers and Dr. Kari Nadeau at the Stanford Alliance for Food Allergy Research in California. **Dr. Moshe Ben-Shoshan**, a pediatric allergist from McGill University and the Montreal Children's Hospital, received the inaugural fellowship in 2010 and is now an AllerGen Principal Investigator.

About AllerGen NCE Inc.

AllerGen's mission is to catalyze and support discovery, development, networking, capacity building, commercialization and knowledge translation that contribute to reducing the morbidity, mortality and socio-economic burden of allergic and related immune diseases. AllerGen invests in research and training undertaken by leading Canadian investigators aimed at the generation of new knowledge about the causes, treatment and prevention of allergic disease, asthma and anaphylaxis.

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