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News Release

Attention: Health/Lifestyle/Science Editors

World Allergy Organization calls for integrated approaches to patient care as the global burden of allergic diseases and asthma continues to rise to epidemic proportions

A Canadian perspective on a global issue

Hamilton, ON (16 April 2012) – Today marks the first day of World Allergy Week, organized by the World Allergy Organization (WAO). In Canada, AllerGen NCE (Allergy, Genes and Environment Network of Centres of Excellence), the national leader in allergy and asthma research, encourages awareness of the allergic epidemic and the burden these diseases place on Canadians and the world.

Dr. Judah Denburg, Scientific Director and CEO of AllerGen NCE says “The WAO data clearly illustrate the global increase in allergic diseases, highlights the increasing severity and complexity of allergies and that the greatest burden of allergies and asthma occurs in children and young adults.”

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), an estimated 300 million individuals have asthma worldwide, a figure that could increase to 400 million by 2025 if trends continue. Allergic rhinitis, which is a risk factor for asthma, affects 400 million people annually, and food allergies affect about 200 to 250 million. An estimated 250,000 avoidable deaths from asthma occur each year. The increase in multiple allergies occurring in a single patient is making the global burden even more complex, and an integrated approach to diagnosis and treatment of allergies is required.

In Canada, 50% of the population is directly or indirectly affected by allergies and asthma and approximately 30 to 40 percent of the world's population suffers from these diseases. In 2004, when AllerGen NCE was first funded by Industry Canada through the federal Networks of Centres of Excellence (NCE) Program, allergic disease was deemed to have reached epidemic proportions.

Dr. Denburg states that “over the past seven years, AllerGen has united Canada's research expertise across the spectrum of biomedical, social and natural sciences, and partners in the public and private sectors, to focus attention and launch discovery leading to innovation, in a co-ordinated effort to reverse this allergy epidemic.”

The Canadian government is standing strongly behind the Network's efforts to stem the growing tide of allergies and asthma. On March 23, 2012, the Honourable Gary Goodyear, Minister of State for Science and Technology announced an additional \$36.5 million in Industry Canada support for AllerGen NCE to continue its research, commercialization and knowledge mobilization efforts to 2019.

A major focus of AllerGen research is finding the origins and root causes of allergies and asthma through its birth cohort study, the *Canadian Healthy Infant Longitudinal Development (CHILD) Study* as well as understanding the connection of environmental exposures on the development of these diseases.

With the growing numbers of asthma sufferers, not only in Canada but around the world, asthma research is a key area for AllerGen and its *Clinical Investigator Collaborative (CIC)*. This clinical group accelerates the discovery and development of new effective medications for allergic asthma while the Biomarkers and Bioinformatics team focuses on the discovery and development of new diagnostics and therapeutics.

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AllerGen has also created a national, bench-to-community, food allergy research initiative called the the *Canadian Group for Food Allergy Research* (CanGOFAR). This is a network of key Canadian epidemiological, social science, public health and knowledge translation experts, working in partnership with federal regulatory agencies such as Health Canada and relevant industry and patient advocacy groups. The activities of this team to date have held critical interest for people living with allergies and their doctors, and are also of great importance to the food industry, pharmaceutical companies, government, schools and patient advocacy organizations.

This group's major achievement, relevant to all Canadians, is having generated reliable, made-in-Canada-for-Canadians food allergy prevalence data for peanut, tree nut, fish, shellfish and sesame allergies. These statistics informed Health Canada's decision to change the *Canadian Food and Drug Regulations*. The new regulations, announced February 14, 2011 by the federal Minister of Health, will come into effect August 4, 2012. These new regulations require food manufacturers and importers to clearly indicate the presence of certain food allergens, gluten sources, and added sulphites on the labels of most pre-packaged food products.

Prof. Ruby Pawankar, WAO President, said "WAO recommends:

- (1) increased, availability and accessibility to allergy diagnosis and therapies
- (2) increased resources dedicated to advanced research toward preventive strategies to increase tolerance to allergens and slow disease progression, and
- (3) global partnerships of multi-disciplinary teams, involving clinicians, academia, patient representatives, and industry.

The common goal is to reduce the burden of allergic diseases and develop cost-effective, innovative preventive strategies and a more integrated, holistic approach to treatment. These efforts can thereby prevent premature and unwanted deaths and improve quality of life."

Dr. Denburg adds that "over the next seven years, AllerGen NCE research teams will break new ground in understanding the causes of allergy, asthma, anaphylaxis and environmental factors that influence these diseases, to improve diagnosis, treatment and prevention. AllerGen's research and development efforts will also create new "high value" jobs, prepare the next generation of researchers, entrepreneurs and experts to fill them, and leave international legacies of socio-economic benefits and improved quality of life for individuals and their families living with allergies, asthma and anaphylaxis."

AllerGen, the Allergy, Genes and Environment Network (www.allergen-nce.ca), is a national research network funded by Industry Canada through the Networks of Centres of Excellence (NCE) Program and is hosted at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario. AllerGen is the Canadian leader in allergy and asthma research and is dedicated to improving the quality of life for people living with allergic and related immune diseases.

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