

The Canadian Scleroderma Research Group Presents....



THE CONNECTOR

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The Third Annual Scientific Meeting 

The year has flown by and we are already making preparations for the Third Annual CSRG Scientific meeting, which will be held in Winnipeg, Manitoba on October 2-4, 2009 at the Delta Hotel. Similar to last year, the CSRG group will have dinner with the Scleroderma Society of Canada (SSC) conference participants on Friday, October 2nd, as well as lunch on Saturday, October 3rd. The CSRG will spend the day together on Saturday, October 3rd and half of the day on Sunday, October 4th. This will be a valuable opportunity for both the researchers and students to present their projects, for the group to discuss administrative issues, to confer about future endeavors, and for all members to come together and encourage collaboration. We have already started booking the hotel rooms, flights and meals for the meeting, so please register as soon as possible. Emails will be sent out periodically containing all the registration documents. If you have any questions regarding the Winnipeg meeting, please do not hesitate to contact Jessica Bernstein at jbernstein@jgh.mcgill.ca OR (514)340-8222 ext 3422.

Thank you again to the generous sponsors of last year's meeting in Ottawa on September 19-21, 2008: CIHR, Actelion, Pfizer, Abbott and Amgen and Wyeth.

April Researchers' Meetings

The CSRG recently held two research meetings at the SMBD-Jewish General Hospital in Montreal, QC. The Clinical Researcher's Meeting was held on Thursday, April 2nd from 09:30 – 13:30 and the Basic Science Researcher's Meeting was held on Friday, April 3rd from 12:00 – 16:00. The purpose of these meetings was to allow all researchers to update the group on the progress of their projects, get feedback from the attendees and begin to consider applications for operating grants to support future projects. The meetings began with PowerPoint presentations from each of the researchers followed by a short question and answer period. The last part of the meeting was dedicated to group discussion relating to the development of future CSRG projects and possible funding opportunities to support the Registry and affiliated projects after the expiration of the NET and STIHR grants. Both meetings were very constructive and some great research hypotheses were developed. We also took time to address certain administrative issues, such as the Biorepository and the budget. To see the Meeting agendas please double click on the following document links:



Basic Science Meeting Agenda



Clinical Meeting Agenda

The Canadian Rheumatology Association Annual Meeting

The 2009 CRA Annual Meeting was held in Kananaskis, Alberta on February 18-21. This year, two CSRG Trainees had posters accepted for presentation at the meeting.

Danny DiCapua presented a poster entitled “Comparative analysis of MR, VEGFR2 and HIF1 α gene expression profiles in systemic sclerosis patient biopsies from affected versus non-affected skin”

Corinne Coulter also presented her CSRG project “Updating the SSc Classification Criteria” at the CRA poster session.

Great work Danny and Corinne!

The Laurentian Conference

The Laurentian Conference was held recently at the Westin Resort & Spa Tremblant in Mont Tremblant, QC from May 7-9. The CSRG was well represented by Dr. Brett Thombs and the Behavioural Health Research Group. The group participated in a session on Scleroderma on Friday afternoon and gave the following presentations:

Marielle Bassel – “Sociodemographic, Disease and Symptom Correlates of Fatigue in Systemic Sclerosis”

Lisa Jewett – “Research Study: Development of Body Image Avoidance Measures for Patients with Scleroderma”

Ruby Knafo - “A Systematic Comparison of Sexual Impairment in Women with Systemic Sclerosis and other Chronic Disease Samples”

Evan Newton – “The Longitudinal Trajectory of Depressive Symptoms in Systemic Sclerosis”

Ilya Razykov – “Prevalence and Clinical Correlates of Pruritis in Patients with Systemic Sclerosis”

Orit Schieir – “Prevalence, Severity and Clinical Correlates of Pain in Patients with Systemic Sclerosis”

Congratulations to all of the presenters for a great session!

Upcoming Meetings and Funding Opportunities



SAVE THE DATE



The **2009 American College of Rheumatology Annual Meeting** will be held in Philadelphia October 17-21. The Abstract submission site recently opened on Monday, April 20th and the deadline to submit your abstract will be Friday, June 26th. Advance housing and registration for the meeting will open on Friday, May 22nd for members and Friday June 5th for non-members. For the latest news and announcements on the conference please check the following link:



[CLICK HERE](#)

The **2010 Canadian Rheumatology Association Annual Meeting** will be held in Quebec on February 3-6. Emails will be sent out to all Trainees as more information becomes available. Resources Material from the 2009 conference should be available soon online at the link below:



[CLICK HERE](#)

As you know the **2009 EULAR Conference** in Copenhagen, Denmark from **June 10-13** is coming up quickly! The preliminary Scientific Programme is now available online and the EULAR abstracts will be available as of May 15th at the following link:



[CLICK HERE](#)

The CIHR competitions for Master's Awards and post-Doctoral Fellowships have already closed for this year. New competitions are expected to be launched this coming June or July. Trainees should expect to receive an email regarding these awards in the coming months.

The 2008-2009 Lecture Series

The **2008-2009 CSRG Lecture Series** will soon be coming to a close. After a great schedule of presenters from across Canada and the United States, as well as France, Italy and Switzerland, we will have one last presentation in the month of May to close out the series. We have had a great collection of lectures for both our Clinical and Basic Science Trainees from "Assessment of Function" to "Epigenetics" and even "Grant Preparation". To see the Web Lecture Repository, containing lectures from both the 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 schedules please double click on the following document link:



Web Course
Repository

The **2009 CSRG Web Seminars** have recently come to a close after six great presentations from our 11 Trainees. Each student gave a short PowerPoint presentation to update their peers and other CSRG group members on their current project. This was followed by a question and answer period where attendees could ask the presenter questions or offer ideas and advice for future work. These seminars are a great opportunity for the Trainees to get to know each other better and learn about the different areas of scleroderma research. All of the seminar recordings from 2008 and 2009 are available when you double click on the following document link:



Web Seminar
Repository

The following is a quote from Dr. Mark Trifiro's Trainee, Daniele-Mario DiCapua, regarding the Web Courses and Seminars:

"The CSRG is unique in that it gives Trainees the opportunity to interact with both students and Principal Investigators in their specific field of research. The Web Courses and Web Seminars have been great tools to learn about up to date research on scleroderma." – Daniele-Mario DiCapua

If you have any questions or suggestions for the 2009 - 2010 Web Courses or Seminars or if you have any researchers that you would be interested to see present, please do not hesitate to contact Jessica Bernstein at jbernstein@jgh.mcgill.ca or at (514) 340-8222 ext 3422.



Trainees

- ◆ Kyle Walker, who is currently completing a B.Sc. Honors in Medical Science at the University of Western Ontario, will begin with the CSRG in September 2009. He will be working on a Master's in Epidemiology under the supervision of Dr. Janet Pope. Kyle's CSRG project is entitled "The Influence of Social and Ethnic Factors on Disease Manifestations in Scleroderma: Results from the CSRG". The purpose of Kyle's project is "to determine the contributions to overall disease and specific organ involvement by a regression model that will include SES factors, gender, age at onset, ethnicity, autoantibodies and determine the importance of these factors with respect to maximum skin score, presence of ILD, presence of PAH, presence of SRC, presence of severe GI involvement, RP complications, myositis, inflammatory arthritis and in subsets such as limited and diffuse SSc". Welcome Kyle!

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- ◆ Corinne Coulter will be leaving the CSRG at the end of August 2009 after having completed a Master's in Epidemiology at the University of Western Ontario. Over the past two years, Corinne has been working on a project entitled "The Development of Scleroderma Classification Criteria", the results of which will be presented at the CSRG's Third Annual Meeting in October. She is hoping to attend medical school in either British Columbia or Thunder Bay, starting in September. Corinne also hopes to present her project's results at the next ACR meeting and is looking forward to the CSRG meeting in October!
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- ◆ Orit Schieir will also be leaving in August 2009 after two years with the CSRG working on a project entitled "A path analysis approach to assessing the longitudinal relationship between pain and symptoms of depression in Scleroderma (SSc)". Orit, who will have earned a Master's in Epidemiology from McGill University, will be starting the PhD program in epidemiology at the Dalla Lana School of Public Health, part of the University of Toronto, come September 2009. She will continue to pursue her interests in musculoskeletal conditions by joining the Arthritis Community Research Evaluation Unit (ACREU) at the Toronto Western Hospital under the supervision of Dr. Elizabeth Badley.
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****Congratulations are in Order****

★ **Lisa Jewett** has received a « Bourses de formation de maîtrise » from the *Fonds de la recherche en santé de Québec (FRSQ)*.

★ **Yuen Yee Ho** and **Evan Newton** have both received McGill Graduate Studies Fellowships for the 2009 winter term.

Welcome to the 2009 Summer Students!



This summer the CSRG will have 7 summer students working with 6 of our Mentors. The summer students will work on their CSRG projects for a period of 12 weeks, the results of which will be presented at our Annual Scientific Meeting in Winnipeg. Students should keep in mind that they will have to submit an End-of-Term Report, a Mentor Evaluation and Lay and Scientific Posters at the latest on September 1, 2009. Mentors will also be asked to submit an evaluation of their student(s) by this date. Email reminders will be sent out later this summer. Please see below for a brief introduction of the 2009 Summer Students and their project.

Student: **Michael Bennaroch**

Mentor: **Dr. Mervyn Gornitsky**

Project: **Salivary Redox Study in SSc Patients and Controls Involving Proteins, Lipids and DNA**

Michael completed a B.Sc. from McGill University and is now studying to become a dentist at Université de Montréal. Michael has been working with Dr. Gornitsky since January 2008 and this will be his second year working as a summer student with the CSRG.

Student: **Sarah Harding**

Mentor: **Dr. Janet Pope**

Project: **Best Practices in Scleroderma**

Sarah is currently in her fourth year of an Honors B.Sc. with a major in Health Sciences. She has previously worked with Dr. Pope as an Article Review Writer, where she gained experience analyzing articles and writing reviews.

Student: **Sarit Khimdas**

Mentor: **Dr. Janet Pope**

Project: **Are Digital Ulcers associated with PAH and can they be a marker of early PAH?**

After completing a B.Sc. with an Honors in Genetics, Sarit began Medical School at the University of Western Ontario. Sarit's past experience as a summer student includes working in Stem Cell research at the McEwen Centre for Regenerative Medicine.

Student: **Ilya Razykov**

Mentor: **Dr. Brett Thombs**

Project: **Development and Validation of a Pruritis Measure for Patients with Systemic Sclerosis**

Ilya is in the process of completing a B.A. with a major in Psychology and minor in Behavioral Science. Ilya has been working with Dr. Thombs and the Behavioral Health Research Team since 2008 and is working on the development and validation of a Quality of Life questionnaire.

Student: **Dr. Reza Taghavi**

Mentor: **Dr. Andrew Leask**

Project: **Is PTEN a potential target for anti-fibrotic drug intervention in SSc?**

Dr. Taghavi completed his Medical Doctorate at the Tehran Azad University of Medical Sciences. He also served as an active member on the university's research committee from September 1995-2002.

Student: **Alissa Trzeciak**

Mentor: **Dr. Anie Philip**

Project: **Investigation of the Role of CD109 in Scleroderma**

Alissa, who is originally from New York, has a B.Sc. from McGill University with a major in Physiology. Since January 2009 she has been working with the Plastic Surgery Department at McGill as a Research Assistant.

Student: **Terence Yung**

Mentor: **Dr. Stephan Van Eeden**

Project: **Circulating Biomarkers Predicting Lung Involvement in Scleroderma**

After completing his B.Sc. in Microbiology and Immunology, Terence is in his first year of medical school at the University of Toronto. Since 2005, he has done a lot of work as a Research Assistant for the BC Cancer Research Centre.

**** Recruiting Rheumatologists and Researchers:** Please keep the following dates in mind: **
March 15th & December 15th: Application deadline for new Trainees (if places are available)
March 31st: Application deadline for new Summer Students

Upcoming CSRG Training Program Deadlines

Trainee Deadlines:

August 15th – Progress report for continuing Trainees [Includes lay and scientific progress report & Evaluations (Mentor and Trainee)]

OR

End of term report for finishing Trainees [Includes lay and scientific end-of-term report & Evaluations (Mentor and Trainee)]

AND

2 posters for CSRG Annual Scientific Meeting (lay and scientific posters)

Summer Student Deadlines:

September 1st – End of term report [Includes lay and scientific end-of-term report & Evaluations (Mentor and Trainee)]

AND

2 posters for the CSRG Annual Scientific Meeting (lay and scientific posters)

If you have any questions about the content of this newsletter or if you would like to contribute to our next issue, please feel free to contact Jessica Bernstein via email: jbernstein@jgh.mcgill.ca .