

The Canadian Scleroderma Research Group Presents....



THE CONNECTOR

Spring 2008: Volume 2, Issue 1

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Our Website

Our CSRG Website is up and running, so check it out next time you are surfing the Web! We are happy to offer you a fully bilingual website, a great way to find out details about all of the different activities of the CSRG. You can learn more about all CSRG students, Trainees and Summer Students and their research projects, as well as our recruiting rheumatologists and collaborators. The site includes a list of all CSRG publications, as well as upcoming events that may be of interest to those involved in Scleroderma research. Also, if you enjoy reading this newsletter, you can visit the site for past issues of our newsletters.

The CSRG Website has much more to offer, so please visit....

www.csrg-grcs.ca

and EXPLORE!!

The April 10th Meeting

The first **CSRG Researcher's Meeting** was held on Thursday, April 10th at the SMBD-Jewish General Hospital. This meeting gathered CSRG Researchers from across Canada, giving them the opportunity to discuss their research and future collaborative projects. The day was composed of plenary and thematic sessions, which allowed researchers to both brainstorm with colleagues working in their field, as well as get an update on the current CSRG research in fields other than their own. We felt that this was a very important event to encourage collaboration among members of the CSRG and we hope that there will be many more to come. This meeting allowed us to update the CSRG Research PowerPoint, which contains a brief summary of the research currently being done by CSRG collaborators.

To view this powerpoint please go online to :

<http://www.centraldesktop.com/mbaron/csrgworkingdocuments/ClickHereToSeeThePowerpointPresentationForTheWholeGroup>

★ **Congratulations are in Order** ★

Mireille Schnitzer and Yuen Yee Ho have both received a McGill Graduate Studies Fellowship valued at \$5000.

The CRA Meeting

March 5th-8th marked the **2008 Canadian Rheumatology Association Annual Meeting**, where several of our collaborators were in attendance and presented posters. Abstracts were presented by both Dr. Marie Hudson on "Gender Differences in Antibody Expression in Systemic Sclerosis" and Dr. Brett Thombs on "Prevalence and Clinical Correlates of Symptoms of Depression in Patients with Systemic Sclerosis". Orit Schieir, Dr. Thombs' Trainee, also presented an oral poster on pain and scleroderma (she also recently gave a presentation at the McGill Epidemiology Research Day).

The CSRG also took this opportunity to have an administrative lunch meeting on Wednesday, March 5th. Rheumatologists, research nurses and coordinators, as well as Mr. Bob Buzza, a patient representative, gathered to discuss a wide range of issues, varying from the future of the registry and the database to how to raise funds to expand this wealth of information. There was of course too much to discuss with too little time, so we look forward to having the weekend together in Ottawa, on September 19th-21st, to continue to have these important discussions.

Upcoming Meetings and Funding Opportunities



Save the Date



The CSRG Second Annual Scientific Meeting



The **second CSRG Annual Scientific Meeting (ASM)** will be held on September 19th-21st, 2008 at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Ottawa. Over the past year the CSRG has grown with leaps and bounds and this meeting will be a wonderful opportunity to catch up on all of the group's activities. Similar to last year, the meeting will be held in conjunction with the Annual Meeting of the Scleroderma Society of Canada. Last year's ASM was a great success, gathering more than 75 Canadian rheumatologists, researchers and nurses, all specializing in Scleroderma. We look forward to improving on last year's success!

We hope that all recruiting rheumatologists, collaborators, coordinators and Trainees will be able to attend! Trainees and Summer Students please keep in mind that you will need to prepare two posters for the annual meeting, one in scientific and the other in lay terms. Invited Trainees and students will have the opportunity to display these posters and present their research projects to both CSRG collaborators and patients from the Scleroderma Society of Canada. Please make an effort to attend the Saturday lunch, as this is the arranged time period to interact with patients. If you would like more information about the meeting or to register, please contact Audrée Janelle-Montcalm via email ajanelle@jgh.mcgill.ca or by phone 514-340-8222 ext 3423.



Dr. Sylvie Laboissiere, from McGill University and the Genome Quebec Innovation Center, will be one of our guest speakers. She will be speaking on Proteomics.



The **2008 American College of Rheumatology Annual Meeting** will be held in San Francisco from October 24th-29th. Here are several dates to keep in mind. Though the first deadline for abstract submission has passed, there is a late-breaking abstract deadline on August 11th. Advance housing and registration for members is open on May 30th and for non-members on June 9th. A few CSRG Trainees have submitted abstracts to present at the ACR and we are happy to announce that those whose abstracts are accepted will be funded \$1000 to help with travel costs.

For more information on this meeting please visit the following site:

<http://www.rheumatology.org/annual/>

The **10th International UK Workshop on Scleroderma Research** is quickly approaching! It will take place in Cambridge, UK on August 2nd-6th and for those who are interested in submitting an abstract, please remember that the deadline is June 6th. You should also apply for a travel award at this time; you will only be funded by the CSRG if you are not granted this bursary.

Please visit their website for more details at the following URL:

<http://sclerodermaworkshop.org/abstracts.htm>

For those Trainees doing their Ph.D., please keep in mind that the next **CIHR Doctoral Research Competition** will open in June. This award is intended to provide special recognition and support to students who are pursuing a PhD degree in a health-related field in Canada or abroad. Please check on their website in June for more details on deadlines and how to apply.

<http://www.researchnet-recherchenet.ca/rnr16/viewOpportunityDetails.do?prog=219&&view=currentOpps&org=CIHR&type=AND&resultCount=25&sort=program&all=1&masterList=true>

The Lecture Series

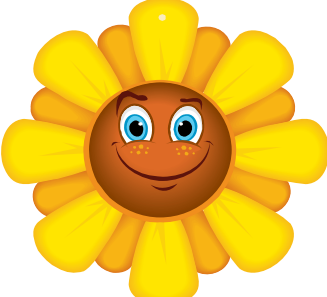
The **2007-2008 CSRG Web Course** and **Web Seminar Lecture Series** are coming to an end and our first year has proven to be a great success!

From the months of October through May we had 24 Web Courses given by 16 speakers. The topics ranged from “Ethical Conduct of Research” and “Research Design and Knowledge Management” through to “Gastrointestinal Manifestations of SSc” and “Microchimerism in SSc”. This wide range of topics is sure to interest researchers from varying fields, so please be sure to visit our website beginning June 1st to access the URLs for the lecture recordings. We will begin the 2008-2009 Web Courses in September 2008 and the format will change quite a bit from this past year. As you know, we have recently begun using the teleconferencing system in conjunction with the Adobe Connect platform, which has greatly improved the sound quality of the lectures. Furthermore, we will no longer have live presentations; instead we will distribute the recordings along with the lecture evaluations. Although this will eliminate the question and answer period, the presenters will be available to answer all of your questions via email. If you have any questions or suggestions for the 2008-2009 Web Courses, please do not hesitate to contact Jessica Bernstein at jbernstein@igh.mcgill.ca or at (514) 340-8222 ext 3422.

In January 2008 we began the CSRG Student Web Seminars. Each seminar is approximately one hour in length, with one or two students presenting their CSRG projects, followed by a short question and answer period. This has been a great opportunity for our students to have an update on the projects of their peers, to brainstorm and offer suggestions. The Web Seminar Repository will also be on the website beginning June 1st, so please take advantage and listen to the recordings.

The Seminars, following in the footsteps of the Web Courses, have also begun to use the teleconferencing system, which has led to some great discussion periods! We will begin to plan the 2009 Web Seminar schedule later this year, so keep an eye out for that email!

Time for a Break...

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**CSRG Students****Trainees**

Since the last issue of The Connector, we have had a few changes to the Trainee/Mentorship Program.

Drs. Steele and Hudson have a new Trainee, Mireille Schnitzer.

Mireille has previously worked for the CSRG under the supervision of Dr. Steele, as part of the 2007 Summer Studentship. She began her Masters in Statistics at McGill University in January 2008 and will be working on a project entitled "Statistical Models for Incomplete Longitudinal Function and Disease Activity Data", a very important project that will help to fill in holes resulting from missing data in the CSRG database. Mireille recently gave a Web Seminar, during which she gave an introduction to Multiple Imputation. This presentation was very well done and can be heard online at the following URL: <http://csrg.acrobat.com/p97552190/>

Dr. Leask has a new Trainee, Dr. Sunil Parapuram, who replaced Sarah McLean.

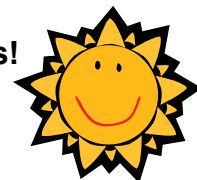
Dr. Parapuram received his Ph.D. in Biology from the University of Cambridge. He began working with Dr. Leask in January 2008 on the project "The role of DICER in tissue repair and fibrosis". The overall goal is to determine whether miRNA is playing a role in fibrotic disease, such as SSc, and whether a more detailed investigation into miRNA action in Scleroderma is warranted.

Dr. Philip's new Trainee, Dr. Xiao-Yong Man, has recently begun his CSRG project in April 2008. Dr. Man, who has a Ph.D. in Dermatology from the Zhejiang University School of Medicine, will be working on a project entitled "Dysregulation of TGF- β Signaling in Scleroderma". Increasing evidence suggests that dysregulation of TGF- β signaling contributes to the distinct properties of Scleroderma fibroblasts and this project will look further into how this is occurring.

Drs. Thombs and Hudson will have a Trainee, Evan Newton, beginning in September 2008. Evan has previously worked for the CSRG under Dr. Hudson, as part of the 2007 Summer Studentship. He will begin a Master's in Psychiatry at McGill University and will work on a project entitled "A Self-Management Program for Patients with Systemic Sclerosis: Effect on patient-reported outcomes and predictors of benefit". The primary objective is to conduct a pilot study to evaluate the potential efficacy of a self-paced, mail-delivered, workbook and DVD self-management intervention for patients with SSc to increase self-efficacy and to reduce disability, pain, and fatigue.

Dr. Baron has a new Clinical Research Fellow who will start in September 2008. Dr. Sergio Toloza received his Medical Degree from the National University of Córdoba in Argentina in 1991 and then went on to specialize in Rheumatology. He will undertake two different projects during his two year term with the CSRG, which will include looking at Gender Differences and Oral Health in SSc. Dr. Toloza plans to investigate, among other things, the role of serum sex hormonal status, clinical and serological differences between pre- and postmenopausal women and the impact of oral health problems and health-related quality of life in SSc.

We would like to welcome our 2008 Summer Students!



Student: **Serena Banh**

Mentor: **Dr. Mark Trifiro**

Project: **Possible Somatic Mutation in Targeted Genes in Scleroderma**

Serena will examine the presence of somatic mutations in select genes, which are believed to play a role in SSc in order to better understand what role mutation may have in the disease.

More 2008 summer students....

Student: Tamara Morrison

Mentor: Dr. Kevin Keen

Project: Summer Assistance for the Development of a Disease Damage Index for Systemic Sclerosis.

Tamara will be assisting the CSRG team of Dr. Keen, Dr. Walker and Dr. Hudson in their development of a Scleroderma Damage Index. The research team plans to examine eight separate organ system scores and create a total disease damage score from among these for the limited and diffuse disease subsets, both separately and combined.

Student: Alexandru Iorga

Mentor: Dr. Philip

Project: Dysregulation of TGF- β Signaling in Scleroderma

Alexandru will play an active role in the research team that will attempt to determine whether the expression pattern of certain endogenous inhibitors in SSc fibroblasts correlates with the clinical phenotype or disease activity and to examine whether TGF- β receptor turnover is altered in SSc fibroblasts.

Student: Kun Huh

Mentor: Dr. Leask

Project: Role of Connective Tissue Growth Factor during Tissue Repair

Kun will work to determine temporal expression of CTGF during the wound healing process, which will help to understand the origin of CTGF from specific cell types and the mechanisms elicited by CTGF during repair. Ultimately, this will help in devising appropriate therapies against CTGF for wound healing abnormalities.

Student: Michael Benarroch

Mentor: Dr. Gornitsky

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

Initial results have shown that the level of oxidation in saliva differs from SSc patients to controls. Michael will look at proteins, lipids and DNA found in the saliva of SSc patients to determine whether these elements have been damaged by oxidative stress, which is associated with SSc.

** For more detailed information on all CSRG Students and their projects please visit our website **

www.csrg-grcs.ca

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: jessica.bernstein@mail.mcgill.ca .