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### Parkinson's Groups Team Up to Award Over \$4 Million Through Community Fast Track Program

February 3, 2004

Eight national and local Parkinson's disease groups teamed together to award approximately \$4 million in research grants through the new Community Fast Track research initiative, led by The Michael J. Fox Foundation for Parkinson's Research (MJFF). The program officially named 18 projects which it will fund over two years through the investigator-initiated program, designed to stimulate novel, innovative and high-impact approaches to the field of Parkinson's research.

Grant recipients were chosen from a large pool of international applicants assessed on the quality of novel science proposed as well as potential to increase understanding of Parkinson's and eventually translate findings into patient treatments. Among this year's awardees, three researchers will be receiving funding specifically to investigate Parkinson's disease for the first time. These three grants represent an early success for the program, which aims to attract new scientists from other research fields to study PD.

"Community Fast Track offers a channel through which Parkinson's groups can contribute to an extremely selective peer-review award process," explained Deborah W. Brooks, executive director. "This collaboration is distinguished not only by the merit of each individual application funded but also by the power of the Parkinson's community as a whole to draw new researchers into the field and cultivate them for long-term development."

Janusz B. Suszkiew, PhD, one of the portfolio's grant recipients receiving funding for the first time in the field of Parkinson's disease, will study the effect of nicotine on inflammatory agents within the brain. Inflammation of brain tissue is widely believed to play an important role in the degeneration of dopamine cells leading to Parkinson's disease. He theorizes that nicotine could have long-term neuroprotective effects by acting to suppress inflammation in the brain and provide the basis for development of new drug treatments for PD patients.

Another grantee, Leo J. Pallanck, PhD, hopes to uncover new therapeutic approaches to treat PD through genetic studies of the disease. He will investigate the genetic factors underlying the toxicity of alpha-synuclein, a protein identified as a primary factor in Parkinson's. His research will contribute to the explanation of how alpha-synuclein kills dopamine neurons in the human brain, which may ultimately advance development of new Parkinson's therapies.

"Many of the projects we have chosen are innovative because they ask new questions," stated Robert E. Burke, MD, Director of Laboratory Research in Parkinson's Disease and Related Disorders at Columbia-Presbyterian Medical Center and member of the scientific advisory boards of MJFF and the Parkinson's Disease Foundation. "However, this portfolio includes grants which are equally exciting and potentially groundbreaking because they offer a new perspective to standard questions and approach them from different angles."

Kimberly Bjugstad, PhD, will revisit the issue of neural tissue transplants for Parkinson's disease patients, which despite high expectations from the scientific community have not yielded successful therapeutic

results in PD patients. Using rat models of Parkinson's disease, Dr. Bjugstad will try to rebuild the nigrostriatal pathway, the neurocircuitry lost in PD patients. She anticipates that a clearer understanding of the reconstruction of this pathway, and development of new grafting techniques, will shed light on why transplants have failed to date.

The following is a complete list of researchers who were awarded grants for The Michael J. Fox Foundation Community Fast Track 2003 initiative:

M. Flint Beal, MD  
Weill Medical College of Cornell University  
Methionine Sulfoxide Reductase & Parkinson's Disease Pathogenesis

Erwan Bezard, PhD  
CNRS UMR 5543 Universite de Bordeaux 2  
Multi-single Unit Electrophysiological Characterization of Dyskinesia Induced by Dopaminergic Drug

Kimberly Bjugstad, PhD  
University of Colorado, Health Sciences Center  
Reconstructing the Neural Circuits in Parkinson's, Using Biodegradable Polymer Bridges or Striatal Co-grafts to Encourage Neural Outgrowth from Transplanted Tissue

Robert Chen, MA, MSc, FRCPC  
Toronto Western Hospital, University of Toronto  
Effects of Subthalamic Nucleus Stimulation on Sensorimotor Integration

Stephanie Cragg, MA, DPhil  
University of Oxford  
The Regulation of Synaptic Dopamine by Striatal Nicotinic Receptor

Peter Jenner, PhD  
King's College London  
Osteopontin as a Regulator of the Inflammatory Response to Nigral Cell Degeneration

Seung-Jae Lee, PhD  
The Parkinson's Institute  
Intracellular Trafficking Dysfunction Caused by Alpha-synuclein Aggregation

Eric J. Nestler, MD, PhD  
UT Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas  
Role of Delta FOSB in the Development of L dopa-induced Dyskinesia in a Non-human Primate Model of PD

Kalipada Pahan, PhD  
University of Nebraska Medical Center  
NBD peptides in MPTP Mouse Model

Leo J. Pallanck, PhD  
University of Washington  
Analysis of Genetic Factors Influencing Alpha-synuclein

Giulio Maria Pasinetti, MD, PhD  
Mount Sinai School of Medicine  
Biomarker Discovery in Parkinson's Disease

Ian J. Reynolds, PhD  
University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine  
Mitochondrial Trafficking in Dopaminergic Neuron Injury

Michael A. Schwarzschild, MD, PhD  
Massachusetts General Hospital  
Adenosine A2A Receptors in a Mouse Model of PD Dyskinesia

Michael Sierks, PhD  
Arizona State University

Morphology Specific Antibodies as Potential Therapeutic

Janusz B. Suszkiw, PhD  
University of Cincinnati College of Medicine  
Anti-Inflammatory Effects of Nicotine in PD

Peter Werner, PhD  
Albert Einstein College of Medicine  
Transgenic Mouse Model of Proteasome Dysfunction in PD

Renping Zhou, PhD  
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey  
Development of the Midbrain Dopaminergic Pathways

Xiaoxi Zhuang, PhD  
The University of Chicago  
In Vivo Investigation of DJ-1 function in DJ-1 Knockout Mice

In addition to The Michael J. Fox Foundation, contributors to the program include: the Parkinson's Disease Foundation, National Parkinson Foundation, The Parkinson Alliance and the Parkinson's Unity Walk, the Parkinson Association of the Sacramento Region, the Parkinson Foundation of the Heartland, and Lawrence County Parkinson's Association. For a full list of grants, visit [www.michaeljfox.org/research](http://www.michaeljfox.org/research).

To date, The Michael J. Fox Foundation for Parkinson's Research has funded nearly \$35 million in research, either directly or through partnerships and anticipates funding approximately \$10 to \$15 million more by spring of 2004. For more information on The Michael J. Fox Foundation for Parkinson's Research, visit [www.michaeljfox.org](http://www.michaeljfox.org).

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