

Canadian Association of Gastroenterology Research Committee Report: Consolidating and expanding



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Derek McKay PhD
Chair, CAG Research Committee

It has been a pleasure and honour to serve as Chair of the Canadian Association of Gastroenterology (CAG) Research Committee for the past three years. I would like to think that some advances and improvements have occurred and that I have not broken anything! I am grateful for the dedication of and assistance from Mr Paul Sinclair, the CAG National Executive Director, Ms Sandra Daniels, Manager, CAG and the most recent member of the team, Ms Karen Moricz. Thank-you. The CAG membership should take pride in the quality of their office staff.

I would also like to thank the entire Research Committee (Table 1) and, on behalf of CAG, Dr Johane Allard, Dr Marc Deschenes, Dr David Armstrong and Dr Linda Yu who will complete their term on the Research Committee this year. The World Congress of Gastroenterology (WCOG) meeting in September 2005 has resulted in the CAG Annual General meeting being postponed until that time, and so the incoming Chairperson and new members to the Research Committee have not yet been identified. When the nominated individuals assume their positions I wish them every success on the committee.

In this, my final opportunity to update the CAG membership and *The Canadian Journal of Gastroenterology* readership on the activities of the Research Committee (2003-2004), I am again delighted to report that it was another outstanding year for investment in gastrointestinal (GI) research in Canada. Clearly, the flagship programs have been consolidated and we are expanding and offering the membership new research opportunities.

AWARDS

Details relating to eligibility and application processes for all of the following awards are available at the CAG Web site <<http://www.cag-acg.org/research/index.htm>>. The review and assessment of every application complies with the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) standards and guidelines and any conflicts of interest are meticulously identified and avoided.

TABLE 1
Composition of the Canadian Association of Gastroenterology Research Committee (2005-2006)

Member	Institution	Term
Chair – to be nominated		2005-2008
Alison Fox-Robichaud MD	McMaster University	2004-2007
Linda Rabeneck MD	University of Toronto	2004-2007
Nathalie Rivard PhD	University of Sherbrooke	2004-2007
Andre Buret PhD	University of Calgary	2004-2007
Jon Meddings MD	University of Calgary	2003-2006
Andrew Stadnyk PhD	Dalhousie University	2003-2006
Young-In Kim MD	University of Toronto	2003-2006
Member to be elected (MD)	–	2005-2008
Member to be elected (PhD)	–	2005-2008
Member to be elected (PhD)	–	2005-2008
Postdoctoral fellow to be selected	–	2005-2007
Stephen Vanner MD*	Queen's University	

*Representative of the Canadian Digestive Health Foundation

Operating grants

The New Investigator Grant in partnership with ALTANA Pharma Inc and the CIHR was awarded to Julie Carrier MD (University of Sherbrooke) for a project entitled, "Chemopreventive action of ERbeta agonist on animal models of intestinal cancer" and the CAG Operating Grant, in partnership with Abbott Laboratories Ltd and the CIHR, went to Louis Liu MD (McMaster University) for a project entitled, "Role of the intramuscular interstitial cells of Cajal in the regulation of gastric motility". Five applications were reviewed in the New Investigator competition and two applications were reviewed in the Operating Grant competition. It was gratifying to see an increase in New Investigator Grant applications, which had slightly faltered in recent years.

The CAG is proud to acknowledge its Benefactor Corporate Sponsors:

Abbott Laboratories Ltd
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Fellow-to-faculty transition awards

Two fellows received bridge funding to facilitate a move into full-time faculty Assistant Professorships (Table 2). Dr Elena Verdu PhD will examine the mechanisms of limited responsiveness to gluten withdrawal in celiac disease, and Dr Alan Lomax PhD will assess the effects of GI inflammation on neural control of the GI vasculature. Three applications were reviewed in the competition and the standard was truly outstanding; it was regrettable that all three applicants could not be funded. This program is in its third year and given the interest and quality of applicants, we hope it is here to stay. It is a pleasure to be able to thank the Crohn's and Colitis Foundation of Canada (CCFC) and AstraZeneca Canada Inc for their continued support of this research initiative.

CAG-CIHR-partnered postdoctoral operating fellowship program

The fellowship program is the cornerstone in CAG research activities and its sustained success makes it a model for other societies. In 2005, 23 fellowship applications were received. With support from CIHR, CCFC, Canadian Digestive Health Foundation (CDHF) and CAG's industrial partners (see acknowledgements) 12 fellowships were funded (Table 3) – a 52% success rate (similar to the 56% success rate in 2004). Eight of 18 applications from PhD scientists (44%) and four of five applications from MD scientists (80%) were funded.

PhD studentships

In the past year, four CAG trainee members received one-year studentships (\$20,500) in a partnered program with CIHR and CDHF with AstraZeneca Canada Inc and Ferring

TABLE 2
Fellow-to-faculty transition awards (2005)

Fellow	Partner	Institution	Supervisor (1 st year only)
E Verdu	AstraZeneca	McMaster University	S Collins
A Lomax	CCFC	Queen's University	S Vanner

CCFC Crohn's and Colitis Foundation of Canada

TABLE 3
Canadian Association of Gastroenterology–Canadian Institutes of Health Research-partnered funded postdoctoral fellowships (2005)

Candidate	Industrial Partner	Years	Institution	Supervisor
Mia Phillipson	AstraZeneca	2 (+1)	University of Calgary	P Kubes
Julia Ewaschuk	AstraZeneca	2 (+1)	University of Alberta	K Madsen
Niall Hyland	AstraZeneca	2 (+1)	University of Calgary	K Sharkey
Jean-Eric Ghia	AstraZeneca	2 (+1)	McMaster University	S Collins
Marinella Holzhausen	Axcan	2	University of Calgary	N Vergnolle
Natalia Kaniuk	Axcan	2	University of Toronto	J Brumell
Claudia Lupp	CCFC	2	University of British Columbia	B Finlay
Thomas Walters	CCFC	2	University of Toronto	A Griffiths
Noel Peretti	Ferring	1	University of Montreal	E Levy
Marnie Duncan	Janssen-Ortho	2	University of Calgary	K Sharkey
Steven Heitman	Janssen-Ortho	2	University of Calgary	R Hilsden
Puneeta Grover	Schering*	1	University of Alberta	V Bain

*In association with the Canadian Association for the Study of the Liver. CCFC Crohn's and Colitis Foundation of Canada

Pharmaceuticals: C McKay (McMaster University), J Scott (University of Western Ontario), J Walker (University of Alberta) and E White (McMaster University). Applications for the 2005-2006 academic year are currently under review at CIHR, a process in which CAG is not involved. Three two-year awards will be made in partnership with CDHF and AstraZeneca Canada Inc.

CAG summer studentships

It is critical that young investigators be supported at all levels of training. Thus, in partnership with CCFC, nine students received awards (salary plus a small operating budget; \$5000 per award) to work in laboratories of recent or established investigators whose interests cover many facets of gut function (Table 4). Twenty-three high quality applications were reviewed, giving an approximately 39% success rate in this year's competition.

Resident research program

In 2004, it was noted that the one remaining constituent of the CAG membership that was not being afforded a research opportunity was the GI resident. Thus, an initiative was launched in 2003/2004 to fund (\$5000) GI resident research projects that could run throughout an academic year. This is the second year of the program and with the support of Procter & Gamble Pharmaceuticals, two awardees were selected from four applications (Table 5). Obviously, there is an interest in this program by residents and faculty, and one that we will work to consolidate.

Congratulations to all the successful awardees. Well done! We look forward to the results of your labours and your continued participation in Canadian GI research and CAG activities. Additionally, I would again like to express many thanks to CIHR and the CAG partners – the nine summer studentships, two resident research awards, 12 fellowships, two transition awards and two grants add up to a 2005 research dollar commitment of \$2,520,000. Simply outstanding!

Canadian Digestive Diseases Week

The Canadian Digestive Diseases week (CDDW) serves many roles and is the occasion when the best of Canadian GI

TABLE 4
CAG-CCFC funded summer studentships (2005)

Candidate	Sponsor	Institution	Supervisor
Tanya Starret	CAG	McMaster University	L Liu
Karl Torbicki	CAG	University of Toronto	N Jones
Kevin Donato	CAG	University of Toronto	P Sherman
Elaine Chow	CAG	University of Calgary	W MacNaughton
David Prescott	CCFC	McMaster University	D McKay
Christine Law	CCFC	University of Toronto	M Silverberg
Garway Wong	CCFC	University of Toronto	Y Kim
Dave Thiel	CCFC	University of Alberta	K Madsen
Vivian Huang	CCFC	Queen's University	M Ropeleski

CAG Canadian Association of Gastroenterology; CCFC Crohn's and Colitis Foundation of Canada

research is showcased. There will be no CDDW in 2005 to avoid any conflict with the WCOG meeting in Montreal. However, the CAG awards have been announced and will be presented prior to WCOG on September 10 at an Awards Ceremony (18h00 Reception, 19h00 Award Ceremony, 20h30 Dinner). The research awardees will have an opportunity to present at CDDW 2006 in Banff, Alberta. The following are the 2005 recipients of CAG awards:

- Dr Kris Chadee (McGill University) – Research Excellence Award;
- Dr Nicola Jones (University of Toronto) – Young Investigator Award;
- Dr Brian Feagan (University of Western Ontario) – Visiting Professor;
- Dr Khursh Jeejeebhoy (University of Toronto) – Education Excellence Award Lecturer; and
- Professor Guido Tytgat (University of Amsterdam) – The RD McKenna Memorial Lecture.

The implementation committee 2006 has already convened and plans are underway for CDDW 2006.

Workshops

This year's funding was supplied to Dr Buret (University of Calgary) as one of the principal organizers of the Banff Inflammation Meeting (February 2005). The funds (\$5000) are used exclusively to support CAG trainee member attendance at the conference.

Research Topics IV meeting

This trainee orientated meeting was held in November 2004 at Kingbridge Centre, King City, Ontario. Thirty-nine trainees of both basic and clinical science were invited to give podium presentations while eight established or junior faculty served as mentors (see *Can J Gastroenterology* 2005;19:165-6). This really was a trainee meeting, with the students and fellows chairing the sessions and dominating the discussion periods. Feedback from the trainees was once again overwhelmingly positive – clearly this is a beneficial event that the trainees enjoy. Financial support via an unrestricted grant was provided by

TABLE 5
CAG funded resident research awards (2005)

Candidate	Sponsor	Institution	Supervisor
Carla Coffin	Procter & Gamble	University of Calgary	S Lee and TI Michalak
Martin LaRocque	Procter & Gamble	McGill University	A Barkun

AstraZeneca Canada Inc, and the scientific program was reviewed by Dr G Greenberg (University of Toronto), Dr K Croitoru and Dr D McKay (both McMaster University), with the CAG national office coordinating the abstract submission, meeting management and event.

Research Topics V is set for October 21-23, 2005. As usual, there will be a call for abstracts. Any topic relating to GI research is eligible (independent of the broad topics identified on the abstract form) and abstracts are selected for presentation based on review of scientific merit.

It has been very gratifying to serve the CAG as Chair of the Research Committee, and to promote so many talented young investigators who have chosen GI-related research as a career path; their achievements to date are impressive and suggest that Canada will continue to set the pace in many aspects of GI research. I believe the CAG Research Committee interactions with CIHR and the CAG pharmaceutical partners have been mutually beneficial and I am grateful that our partners have been so generous in supporting the many (new and established) research endeavors of the CAG, and recognize the value of these programs. I am confident that subsequent CAG Research Committees will continue to elevate the Association to new heights.

With thanks, Derek M McKay PhD

E-mail mckayd@mcmaster.ca, Chair, CAG Research Committee

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