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Diabetes research in Toronto boosted with help from Novo Nordisk

May 20, 2010 - Research into the cause and treatment of diabetes in Canada will be significantly enhanced by the establishment of a new research Chair at the Banting & Best Diabetes Centre at the University of Toronto and the University Health Network -- thanks to a gift from Novo Nordisk.

Prof. Dan Drucker, Director of the Banting & Best Diabetes Centre will serve as the inaugural Banting & Best Diabetes Centre-Novos Nordisk Chair in Incretin Biology. A clinician-scientist world-renowned for his ability to translate scientific breakthroughs into clinical treatments for patients, Prof. Drucker also holds a Canada Research Chair in Regulatory Peptides.

The new Chair will be created through a \$3 million gift from Novo Nordisk.

“Incretin biology holds the potential to play the kind of transformative impact that insulin had in improving the lives of people with diabetes. This new Chair will position the Banting & Best Diabetes Centre as a leader in this area of research,” said Catharine Whiteside, Dean of the University of Toronto Faculty of Medicine.

“This is an exciting time for diabetes research in Canada. We are tremendously proud to be a part of the effort to support the BBDC-Novos Nordisk Chair in Incretin Biology. In light of the increasing prevalence of diabetes, we look forward to the advancements that will come as a result of this focused research for the sake of diabetes patients everywhere,” said Dr. Robert S. Bell, President and CEO of University Health Network.

“The challenges that an aging, changing population such as ours poses to the health care system require the ingenuity, imagination and skill of researchers like Dan Drucker. His accomplishments make him an ideal inaugural Chair holder. As a leading pharmaceutical company engaged in peptide research, we’re very proud to be associated with Prof. Drucker,” said Lars Rebién Sørensen, President and CEO of Novo Nordisk.

“Normally, after establishing such an endowed chairmanship, the challenge is then to find someone large enough to fill it, but in this case, it is actually Prof. Dan Drucker’s continued contributions to the field of diabetes research and treatment that inspired us to establish this endowment in the first place,” noted Prof. Mads Krosgaard Thomsen, Executive Vice President and Chief Science Officer of Novo Nordisk. “It is also no coincidence that we chose to place the chairmanship at the University of Toronto, the institution that has played such a critical role in the history of insulin treatment and continues to contribute to the advancement of this field today.”



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Prof. Drucker has devoted his professional life to the study of a family of hormones produced in the pancreas, gastrointestinal tract and brain and the development of treatments for diabetes, obesity and intestinal disorders. His lab made headlines around the world in 2008 with the discovery of a weekly insulin injection which could replace the twice-daily regimen endured by many people with diabetes. That same year, he received the Prix Galien Foundation Research Award, and last year he was recipient of the Endocrine Society's Clinical Investigator Award.

The creation of the Banting & Best Diabetes Centre-Novo Nordisk Chair in Incretin Biology is the latest chapter in the history of leading diabetes research at the University of Toronto and the University Health Network. In the early 1920s, two researchers at the U of T Faculty of Medicine – Frederick Banting and Charles Best – worked with collaborators J.H.R. MacLeod and James Collip to discover insulin. The first patients treated with insulin were at the Toronto General Hospital, which is now part of the University Health Network. Banting and MacLeod were awarded the 1923 Nobel Prize for medicine.

In 2007, the University Health Network and the University of Toronto entered into a partnership with the Banting & Best Diabetes Centre. According to the Canadian Diabetes Association, nearly one in four Canadians has diabetes or pre-diabetes and more than 20 people are diagnosed with the disease every hour, every day. The percentage of Canadians with diabetes is increasing from 4.2 percent in 2000 to 7.3 percent in 2010 to an estimated 9.9 percent by 2020. The annual economic cost of diabetes has doubled in the past decade to \$12.2 billion.