

Contact: Susan Marshall, Brain Tumour Foundation of Canada
Tel: 1-800-265-5106, ext. 222
Email: smarshall@braintumour.ca

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Brain Tumor Funders' Collaborative Announces 11 New Grants

Funding by non-profit collaborative group will spur testing of non-invasive methods for monitoring brain tumor responses to new therapies

LONDON, ON (January 20, 2010) – The Brain Tumor Funders' Collaborative (BTFC) today announced the award of 11 one-year feasibility grants of \$100,000 each to teams of researchers and clinicians developing the types of tools needed to translate scientific discoveries into effective new treatments for brain cancer patients. The BTFC's second joint initiative for brain tumor research is intended to accelerate the testing of different kinds of brain tumor response markers – reliable, easily monitored biological signals that can reveal if and how a tumor is responding to therapies.

"Each project focuses on a unique approach to solving a vexing problem encountered by clinicians and researchers dedicated to improving patient outcomes from one of the most deadliest types of cancer," said Dr. Susan Fitzpatrick of the James S. McDonnell Foundation, one of the eight BTFC members. The other seven participating organizations are American Brain Tumor Association, Brain Tumour Foundation of Canada, Children's Brain Tumor Foundation, Goldhirsh Foundation, Ben and Catherine Ivy Foundation, National Brain Tumor Society and Sontag Foundation.

"Having the ability to monitor brain tumor characteristics consistently and reliably using non- or minimally invasive approaches is of particular importance to patients, especially for children," said Susan L. Weiner of the Children's Brain Tumor Foundation.

Elizabeth Wilson of the American Brain Tumor Association, added, "When time is of the essence, being able to quickly and accurately determine the effectiveness, or not, of the available therapeutic approaches could make all the difference to a patient's longevity and well-being."

According to the Central Brain Tumor Registry of the United States, approximately 22,000 people annually are diagnosed with a primary malignant brain tumor, and another 38,000 have nonmalignant brain tumors. Because brain tumors affect neural and cognitive functions, both the disease and its treatment have a high incidence of disability.

"Tragically, this year an estimated 13,000 people will die of brain tumors," said Dr. David R. Hurwitz of the National Brain Tumor Society. "Over 3,700 children under the age of 15 are diagnosed with this disease. In addition, pediatric brain tumors have surpassed leukemia as the leading cause of cancer death in children."

Inaugurated in 2003, The Brain Tumor Funders Collaborative is a strategic effort among private foundations and non-profit organizations to pool their resources and focus their research dollars toward specific therapeutic goals. "Advancing brain tumor research requires scientists, clinicians, and funders to come together around the same table and identify what needs to be done," said Rita Berkson of the Goldhirsh Foundation.

Kay Verble of the Sontag Foundation agreed on the need for a collaborative approach to attacking brain cancers. "We are learning both the pitfalls and the tremendous advantages of working together, to sharpen our own ability to invest strategically in the brain tumor research effort," she said.

The 11 funded projects were selected during a multi-stage review process from more than 54 responses to the BTFC call for proposals. At the end of the year, the BTFC will evaluate progress and consider further investments.

Prior to announcing the awards, BTFC representatives spent 18 months meeting with experts and exploring a variety of translational research opportunities. "Our analysis of the brain tumor research landscape identified the need for reliable brain tumor response markers as a priority," explained Rob Tufel of the Ben and Catherine Ivy Foundation.

"Although the current armamentarium for treating brain tumors is limited, a number of new treatment options will be coming online," said Susan Marshall of the Brain Tumour Foundation of Canada. "Validated tumor response markers will be a necessary component of research and clinical decision making."

Despite the dedicated efforts of researchers and clinicians, the identification of successful treatments for brain tumors remains elusive. “We believe the unusual case of eight private funders working together in a spirit of cooperation and openness sends a powerful message,” said Fitzpatrick. “It is time for some new ways of attacking this devastating disease.”

The eleven funded projects are:

Children’s Hospital Boston

Investigator: Edward R. Smith

Urinary Biomarkers for Non-invasive Assessment of Therapeutic Efficacy in Glioma

Emory University School of Medicine

Investigator: Erwin G. Van Meir

Development of Protein Arrays for the Detection of Biomarkers in the CSF of Brain Tumor Patients

Johns Hopkins University

Investigator: Jaishri O. Blakeley

Amide Proton Transfer MR Imaging to Assess Tumor Response in Patients with Gliomas

Johns Hopkins University

Investigator: Luis A. Diaz

Circulating Tumor DNA as a Dynamic Biomarker in Malignant Gliomas

Johns Hopkins University

Investigator: Alena Hoska

Non-invasive Assessment of Glutamate in Glioblastoma Multiforme: Effect of Treatment

Massachusetts General Hospital

Investigator: Bob S. Carter

Exosome Analysis: A Non-Invasive Approach to Monitor Treatment Responses in Glioma Patients

Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center

Investigator: Andrew B. Lassman

Molecular Determinants of [18F]FACBC-PET Imaging in Brain Tumors

University of California (David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA)

Investigator: Whitney B. Pope

Combining Genomics with Physiologic Imaging Biomarkers to Predict and Follow Treatment Response in Glioma

University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center

Investigator: Kenneth D. Aldape

A combined molecular and clinical predictor of progression vs. pseudoprogression in newly diagnosed GBM.

University of Washington

Investigator: Kristin R. Swanson

Patient-specific Metrics of Treatment Response

Vanderbilt University Medical Center

Investigator: Kyle D. Weaver

Monitoring Response to Therapy in Malignant Glioma Patients Using Blood-Based Epigenomic and Proteomic Biomarkers

More information about the BTFC and its funding initiative is available at www.braintumorfund.org.

Brain tumor facts are available at <http://www.nci.nih.gov/cancertopics/types/brain/>

###