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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

LEADING HALIFAX RESEARCHER RECEIVES MAJOR STEM CELL RESEARCH AWARD

HALIFAX, NS: 16 April 2003 - Dr. Ivar Mendez, Head of the Division of Neurosurgery at the Queen Elizabeth II Health Sciences Centre and Dalhousie University and Chair of the Brain Repair Centre, is part of a scientific team that has been awarded nearly \$1.2 million for leading-edge research into the use of stem cells to treat individuals with Parkinson's disease and stroke. Approximately \$350,000 of this national grant money will go directly to research carried out in Nova Scotia – one of the largest grants ever awarded for stem cell research in Atlantic Canada.

“Stem cells have the potential to revolutionize medicine and offer real hope to individuals with degenerative and other diseases. Research is the key to realizing that potential,” said Dr. Mendez. “We have worked hard to ensure Halifax is at the cutting-edge in the country for stem cell research into Parkinson's disease, and I am grateful to the Stem Cell Network for awarding these important grants so we can continue this groundbreaking work.”

The Stem Cell Network is one of 22 Networks of Centres of Excellence, Canada's flagship science and technology program. It brings together more than 50 leading scientists, clinicians, engineers, and ethicists to investigate the therapeutic potential of stem cells for the treatment of diseases currently incurable by conventional approaches. Stem cells differ from other kinds of cells in the body. All stem cells — regardless of their source — have three general properties: they are capable of dividing and renewing themselves for long periods; they are unspecialized; and they can give rise to specialized cell types.

Dr. Mendez will head a national study into the use of stem cells in the treatment of Parkinson's. The research initiative, which will involve leading researchers across the country, will explore the use of stem cells to replace damaged neurons in individuals with Parkinson's. A major grant was also awarded for research into the use of stem cells as a means of repairing the brain after a stroke. Dr. Mendez and the Brain Repair Centre will be a central player in this national research initiative.

The funding from the Stem Cell Network will also be used to secure other resources. The national award, for example, represents an important source of matching funds for a recent Atlantic Innovation Fund grant awarded to the Brain Repair Centre.

“Awards like these are tremendously important to Nova Scotia. Not only do they advance our understanding of devastating diseases but they contribute to the growth of a vibrant and healthy research community – and that benefits all Nova Scotians,” said Dr. Noni MacDonald, Dean of the School of Medicine at Dalhousie University.

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“When research is enhanced, health care is enhanced,” said Dr. John Ruedy, Vice-President, Academic Affairs with Capital Health. “Leading research centres attract practicing physicians, educators and other researchers. This, in turn, improves the health of our communities and our residents.”

The Brain Repair Centre is a key component in building an outstanding research community. It is a multidisciplinary collaboration linking more than 100 world-class researchers and physicians specializing in the field of brain repair. Together they will be leading research in neurological disorders that include Parkinson’s, Huntington’s, Alzheimer’s, multiple sclerosis, epilepsy, cancer, spinal cord injury, vision disorders, stroke and serious mental illness. The Centre will also contribute to the growing infrastructure of the Life Sciences Research Village, a virtual and actual research community including researchers, entrepreneurs, industry, technology professionals and organizations that support the life sciences sector in the region.

“The Brain Repair Centre represents a dynamic combination of the best researchers and physicians partnered with sound institutional and commercial groups committed to the advancement of brain repair research,” said Dr. Mendez. “With awards like those from the Stem Cell Network and the Atlantic Innovation Fund, we are fulfilling that commitment.”

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