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POWERFUL MRI MAGNET ARRIVES IN HALIFAX

HALIFAX, NS: 15 May 2003 - The centerpiece of Halifax's advanced neuroimaging research facility was installed in its new home earlier this week.

The 4 Tesla magnet is the essential component of the magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) system announced last summer by the Brain Repair Centre (BRC), the National Research Council (NRC), the Province of Nova Scotia, Capital Health, Dalhousie University and QEII Foundation. In total, the partners committed over \$9 million to develop the ultra-high-field system and accompanying research facility and support several research and technical positions.

"The installation of the 4Tesla magnet is a significant milestone," says Dr. Ivar Mendez head of the Division of Neurosurgery at Dalhousie University and Queen Elizabeth II Health Science Centre and chair of the BRC. "Halifax is a world leader in neuroscience research and this critical infrastructure presents even greater opportunities for the future. Today, we are closer than ever before to new discoveries, commercial opportunities and important clinical applications," added Dr. Mendez.

"This high field MRI system will allow neuroscientists and physicians not only to visualize brain anatomy noninvasively, but also to watch the brain working in real time," says Dr. Ian Smith, Director General of NRC's Institute for Biodiagnostics. "This will allow a greater understanding of how the brain works, and allow physicians to follow the success of their brain repair procedures."

The MRI project has already attracted several leading researchers to the region. Over the last year, the NRC's Institute for Biodiagnostics (Atlantic) has assembled a leading team of experts in physics, bioinformatics, and neuroscience. A top physicist from the United States is returning to Atlantic Canada to work on the project along with a bioinformatics specialist from France. Two imaging specialists (an MRI technologist and a neuroscientist) have also returned to Atlantic Canada. Two students from the NRC's Women in Science and Engineering initiative are also engaged in the project.

The over 18 tonne magnet was constructed in England and shipped to Halifax. Project developers, East Port Properties Limited, used a specialty crane to hoist the massive magnet and position it in the new research centre under construction adjacent to the existing Diagnostic Imaging Department at the Halifax Infirmary site of the QE II Health Sciences Centre.

The remaining components will be installed and the system will be tested and refined over the next several months. The MRI system is expected to be fully operational in time for the official opening of the neuroimaging research facility in early autumn.

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