

# Mega university seeks N.S. brain repair skills

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The largest university in the world wants to tap into Nova Scotia's expertise in brain repair.

Jilin University in Changchun, China, which boasts 100,000 students and a faculty of 20,000, has entered a collaboration agreement with the Brain Repair Centre at Dalhousie University.

The university, in northeastern China, learned about the centre's innovative work several years ago through articles in medical journals, said Dr. Ivar Mendez, director of the Brain Repair Centre.

A delegation from China visited the Halifax centre in 2007.

"They wanted to (use) some of the technology and know-how from the centre to create a brain repair centre of their own," Dr. Mendez said in an interview Monday. "We've been working with them since that time and we've put together a memorandum of understanding."

Dr. Mendez travelled to Changchun three weeks ago to sign the agreement. He was amazed by the size of the university and the scope of the local health system.

The largest hospital in the region, which just opened, has 4,500 beds and a staff of 55 neurosurgeons. That compares to the Queen Elizabeth Health Sciences Centre's 1,110 beds and nine neurosurgeons.

Their resources and infra-

structure are impressive "but they lack innovation and that's where we come in," Dr. Mendez said.

The Brain Repair Centre has gained an international reputation for its pioneering work. More than 100 world-class researchers and doctors collaborate in fields such as imaging, stem cell neurobiology, pharmacology and psychiatry.

For example, the centre has developed technology to inject stem cells into damaged brain tissue. These treatments have led to dramatic improvements in patients suffering from conditions such as Parkinson's disease. The tool used for this work, the Halifax Injector, is now used at Harvard University and Cardiff in Wales.

The centre will train the university's staff on its procedures, while the university may help fund joint projects in the future, Dr. Mendez said.

But the agreement has more far-reaching benefits, he said. It extends the centre's international connections and "may open opportunities (in China) for other innovative companies and institutions in Nova Scotia."

A delegation of scientists and CEOs from major hospitals in the Jilin region will visit the centre sometime this summer, he said.

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