

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

# 2012 MSFHR Scholar Awards an investment in the health of British Columbians

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The Michael Smith Foundation for Health Research (MSFHR) is pleased to announce the recipients of its 2012 research scholar funding competition. Of the more than 100 applicants, MSFHR has funded 23 scholar awards that will support researchers establishing or building research programs. Our scholars are addressing critical health issues — everything from examining how the proteins that cause neurodegenerative diseases like Parkinson’s could be blocked or modified to looking at how highly active antiretroviral therapy (HAART) could be used to halt the spread of the HIV virus.

“Excellent health researchers and the work they do are at the core of the good health we enjoy today as British Columbians,” said Dr. Diane Finegood, MSFHR president & CEO. “Their research is also integral to tackling the health challenges we face in the future. Our investment in these 23 exceptional health researchers offers a great return on investment for our province.”

The Foundation is funded primarily by the BC government, with a mandate to strengthen BC’s health research enterprise. From seeking a cure for childhood diabetes, to HPV vaccine research, to helping patients in remote communities better manage chronic diseases at home, the Foundation supports health research that benefits thousands of families.

“Health research is an important investment for our government,” said Health Minister Michael de Jong. “A commitment to health research is a commitment to advancing the health of B.C. families as well as generating hundreds of jobs in the field of health science ranging from students through to well-established researchers who are addressing critical health issues.”

Thanks to the BC government, MSFHR’s award competitions have funded nearly 1,500 awards since 2001 — from trainees through well-established investigators — who are working to resolve health and health system challenges. The Foundation also funds research teams, supports research projects, and brings together BC’s universities, health authorities, non-profit organizations and government for health research planning and action.

A complete list of the 2012 scholars and their research projects may be viewed at  
[http://www.mschr.org/who\\_we\\_fund/past\\_recipients/2012/Career%20Investigator%20Program](http://www.mschr.org/who_we_fund/past_recipients/2012/Career%20Investigator%20Program)

A backgrounder on four of our awardees follows this document.

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***About the Michael Smith Foundation for Health Research:***

*The Michael Smith Foundation for Health Research (MSFHR), funded by the government of British Columbia, is the province's health research support agency. MSFHR's mandate is to strengthen BC's health research enterprise — which in turn improves the health of British Columbians, their health system and their economy. MSFHR is dedicated to the memory of Nobel Prize recipient Dr. Michael Smith, a pre-eminent BC scientist with a long-standing commitment to supporting researchers throughout their careers.*

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## 2012 MSFHR Scholar Awards – Highlighted Projects

### **Dr. Zabrina Brumme (Simon Fraser University)**

Dr. Brumme will lead the first large-scale investigation of HIV's adaptation to the body's immune response. By analyzing HIV and host genetic sequences from 1979 to the present, her research team will characterize HIV evolution over the epidemic's course. The results of this study will reveal the effect of human immune pressure on HIV replication and viral protein function, with the potential to advance HIV vaccine research significantly.

### **Dr. Tobias Kollmann (University of British Columbia)**

Dr. Kollmann is contrasting the development of the human immune system in children around the world. By comparing children born in Vancouver to those born in South Africa, Mozambique, Ecuador, and Belgium, his research team aims to identify genetic and environmental factors that drive immune development and with that susceptibility to illness or response to vaccination. Worldwide millions of newborns and infants die each year from infectious disease, many of them preventable by already existing vaccines. Kollmann's research aims to identify safe and effective interventions to prevent these deaths.

### **Dr. Carlo Menon (Simon Fraser University)**

Dr. Menon is leading the design of a robotic device to assist individuals with weakened upper extremities due to aging, stroke, injury, or other diseases. The portable and wearable device will assist with functional movements and strengthen the muscular tone of injured extremities. This research will improve the quality of life for individuals with neuromuscular disorders by restoring mobility of the upper extremities, which is critical for activities of daily living, such as eating and dressing.

### **Dr. Scott Venners (Simon Fraser University)**

Dr. Venners is studying the impact of exposures to environmental pollutants and their links to health inequalities between richer and poorer people, specifically small size at birth and diabetes in adulthood. For example, babies born to mothers in poorer parts of Vancouver are more likely to be born under-sized than those born in other parts of the city, and higher levels of exposure to second-hand smoke and other pollutants may be a factor. The project will also study the links between socioeconomic status, exposure to pollutants in adulthood, and inequalities in diabetes risk between richer and poorer Canadians.

