

Press Release

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JOINT FORCES AGAINST HEPATITIS VIRUSES

GERMAN-CANADIAN PARTNERSHIP: HELMHOLTZ-ALBERTA INITIATIVE NOW ALSO EXTENDS TO INFECTION RESEARCH

To address pressing questions about infectious diseases jointly is the main goal of a new collaborative effort between the University of Alberta (UofA), Canada, and the Helmholtz Association. On 23 September, their research partnership was sealed at the Braunschweig campus of the Helmholtz Centre for Infection Research (HZI) when the HZI's director Prof Dirk Heinz and UofA VP Prof Lorne Babiuk co-signed the collaboration agreement. By this the partners are expanding their existing cooperation as part of the Helmholtz-Alberta Initiative (HAI), which began in 2009 emphasising on energy and the environment.



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Dirk Heinz und Lorne Babiuk signing the agreement

The new collaborative, called the “Helmholtz-Alberta Initiative – Infectious Disease Research” (HAI-IDR) allows the institutions to benefit from the partners’ collective know-how as well as from their infrastructure. The main focus of the partnership will be on infections caused by hepatitis viruses. Those lead to progressive destruction of the liver and, ultimately, cause death. Currently, over half a billion people worldwide are suffering from infections caused by hepatitis B (HBV) or C (HCV) virus.

The development of vaccines against hepatitis B will be one focus of the new research alliance as treating chronic diseases can be a real challenge. Furthermore, the search for new antiviral drugs and prophylactic vaccines against hepatitis C virus are on the scientific agenda of the collaboration.

Equally as important as the research itself is the integrated educational and training programme, which is designed to strengthen the German-Canadian collaborative for the long run. Both partners are hopeful that new projects will come out of this programme and that in the long run the collaboration will cover the entire field of infectious diseases. “This programme will help us be well-prepared to meet future infectious diseases head-on,” says Prof. Dirk Heinz, the HZI’s scientific director.

A presentation on the topic of vaccine research given by Prof. Lorne Babiuk, UofA’s VP, on Tuesday, September 24, 2013, followed by a talk between Babiuk and a group of HZI junior researchers will offer an initial glimpse at the new collaboration.

In addition to the HZI and the University of Alberta, the Helmholtz Institute for Pharmaceutical Research Saarland (HIPS), the TWINCORE Center for Experimental and Clinical Infection Research and the Helmholtz Center Munich/German Research Center for Health and Environment (HMGU) are all partners in this alliance.

The Helmholtz Centre for Infection Research:

At the Helmholtz Centre for Infection Research (HZI) in Braunschweig, scientists are studying microbial virulence factors, host-pathogen interactions and immunity. The goal is to develop strategies for the diagnosis, prevention and therapy of human infectious diseases.

www.helmholtz-hzi.de/en