



Partners in the pursuit of discovery

For Mark Krembil and family, giving back is a long-term investment

David Israelson

The Krembil Foundation was born out of a family's collective desire to help people.

Since 2001, it has focused almost exclusively on funding leading-edge medical research – research that will dramatically change people's lives in the long run.

To the entire Krembil family, research is key. They are passionate about it and they understand its impact on health care.

"This is a family affair," says Mark Krembil, President of the Krembil Foundation. "As a family, we've been philanthropic for many years. We had this concept of giving back to others, and investing in medical research was a logical way to do this."

In Mark's view, there is a critical and persistent lack of medical research funding, which does make a significant difference to health care and, ultimately, to society.

"Years ago, we started investing in neuroscience research, as it was severely underfunded," Mark says. "To maximize the Foundation's impact, we've decided to make brain research one of our priorities."

Research requires a long-term investment on all fronts. This is a familiar concept for the Krembil family: it's the core philosophy of the investment firm Trimark Financial, founded by Mark's father, Robert. The Foundation uses a similar methodology for analyzing equities as they do for deciding how to invest philanthropically.

"We take a long-term perspective, while continuing to do in-depth study and review," he says.

Focusing on complex medical research requires a great deal of due diligence. Ex-

pertise and a professional team are required to make sure that grant applications are properly assessed and that the funding gets to the doctors and scientists who will use it effectively.

The Foundation operates on a combination of scientifically based advice, but also on close-knit family decisions.

"While I manage the day-to-day operations, we really make decisions as a family," Mark says. "We meet a few times a year to review and update our granting portfolio."

Mark and his family members serve in all the board positions at the Foundation. This lean structure forces the Foundation to focus its funds on worthy research projects, rather than on office overhead.

"The major executive functions of the Foundation are performed by Michelle Tricarico, our grant administrator, and Dr. Kate Williams, our scientific director."

Dr. Williams, who holds a neuroscience PhD from McMaster University, helps bring scientific rigour to the Foundation and its decisions. She is responsible for overseeing the evaluation of research proposals submitted to the Foundation.

"We're looking for scientists with whom we can build long-term partnerships," Mark says. "We try to be strategic and identify projects that might have trouble finding funding elsewhere."

Research is about ideas that yield new information, he explains. "Sometimes the research doesn't always work out the way you expected, and that's okay. It leads to new opportunities."

The Foundation is always interested in

new and exciting projects that have the potential to produce life-altering results. This was the major impetus behind the naming of the Krembil Research Institute (Krembil).

Krembil is relentless in its work directed at developing diagnostics, treatments and management strategies for brain and spine disorders such as Parkinson's disease and stroke, as well as bone, joint and eye disorders. The Foundation is one of many that continue to actively support the groundbreaking research projects that take place within Krembil.

The goal of Krembil is to be one of the top five research institutes in the world, and to that end, within five years it's seeking to increase its number of high-impact papers and citations by 10 per cent, recruit eight new researchers and establish a clinical research unit to add to its growing capacity and collaboration with other institutes.

It is the Krembil Foundation's expectation that its support will lead to the advancement of scientific understanding and breakthroughs at Krembil. The work is showing promising results. Krembil scientists are closer than ever to developing drugs that will stop the progression of Alzheimer's and minimize stroke damage, and to unlocking the mysteries of diseases that are not well understood such as Parkinson's and Rett syndrome.

Mark hopes more people will join his family in supporting Krembil, and he believes that anyone who does should be confident that the talent there will lead to new treatments and cures. ■