

Recruiting and retaining the best and the brightest

Multidisciplinary research and creative thinking aid the Peter Munk Cardiac Centre in its relentless search for top talent

By **Mary Gooderham**

THE PETER MUNK CARDIAC CENTRE (PMCC) HAS BECOME A POWERFUL CENTRE FOR INNOVATIVE MEDICAL RESEARCH that attracts scientists from all over the world. “The multidisciplinary environment allows cross-fertilization of ideas by stimulating interaction across various medical specialties and scientific disciplines. This feature of our environment is attractive to bright, creative people,” says Dr. Michael Domanski, Cardiology Division Director at University Health Network (UHN) and Mount Sinai Hospital.

Dr. Domanski, a specialist in advanced heart failure and transplant cardiology, made the move from the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai Hospital in New York to the PMCC “because it looked like a chance to make a difference in terms of research and also in patient care and teaching,” he says. “The commitment of the organization to innovation is expressed by its leadership.”

Dr. Patrick Lawler, a cardiologist who joined the PMCC’s emerging cardiovascular clinical trials group in April, was attracted from his position at Brigham and Women’s Hospital and Boston Children’s Hospital, as well as Harvard Medical School in Boston, because the centre encouraged creative thinking and encouraged taking scientific risks.

“It seemed like there was a spirit of wanting to do different things and trying different approaches to

a disease that we’ve been treating for some time,” he says, noting that a good deal of research “has plateaued” in cardiovascular disease. “It’s time for a fresh look and a fresh perspective, and I thought that the people here were the ones who might be able to do that.”

Dr. Lawler, a Boston native who attended medical school and completed his residency at McGill University in Montreal, was impressed with the diverse group of people at the PMCC who have expertise in clinical trials, including epidemiologists, biostatisticians, regulatory scientists and administrators.

“Lots of aspects of science are a team sport, but having the right team is really essential to doing these large clinical trials and translational studies,” he says, adding that international recruitment is part of an overall trend to “break down the borders” in medicine.

“One of the richnesses of the medical community here is the diversity of backgrounds that people bring from across the world,” Dr. Lawler says. “It’s important to continue that.”

Dr. Barry Rubin, Medical Director of the PMCC, says that recruiting is among the stated goals of the Peter and Melanie Munk Charitable Foundation’s third donation to the PMCC in 2011, along with retaining the best and the brightest.

“We’ve been unbelievably successful at doing that,” he says, noting that key elements of the strategy have included



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establishing five new chairs and four centres of excellence. “Our vision is to be the best heart centre in the world, and you can’t be that without having the best people.”

Dr. Rubin says the new recruits in turn are attracted by the PMCC’s vision, its multidisciplinary approach, its cohesive program and a “constant and unremitting focus on innovation.” He calls the substantial number of recruits from the U.S. “the reverse of the brain drain,” made possible with substantial funds from donors to the PMCC, including the Munks.

He says, for example, that Dr. Lawler “is truly at the cutting edge,” and “every major heart centre” tried to hire him. “For somebody with his pedigree to

look out over the landscape and choose the PMCC tells you about the draw that we have. He could have gone anywhere.”

Another new recruit, Dr. Patrick Veit-Haibach, a radiologist and nuclear medicine physician, came to the PMCC’s Joint Department of Medical Imaging in April from the University of Zurich. As director of Positron Emission Tomography/Magnetic Resonance imaging (PET-MRI), his clinical research focus is combining molecular imaging strategies, such as allowing physicians to assess the profusion, function and viability of blood flow at the same time. “You can follow the physiological pathway of diseases,” he says.

Dr. Veit-Haibach is excited to be at the PMCC, given its “large



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01 Dr. Patrick Veit-Haibach is a radiologist and nuclear medicine physician who came from the University of Zurich. He says the interdisciplinary approach at the PMCC inspires teamwork and innovation.

02 Dr. Michael Domanski is a specialist in advanced heart failure and transplant cardiology. The PMCC’s multidisciplinary setting inspired his move from New York City.

03 Dr. Patrick Lawler, who was attracted to the PMCC because it encouraged creative thinking, believes having the right team is key to doing large clinical trials and translational studies.

patient population with all sorts of cardiovascular indications,” as well as its enthusiasm for using molecular imaging in all sorts of trials.

“It makes it interesting,” he says, noting that he’s pleased to get a good deal of academic time at the PMCC, which has a strong focus on translating basic science to clinical science. “There’s something to build up here, so we can understand disease, where it comes from and how to intervene successfully to bring relief to patients.”

Interdisciplinary exchange is “very much encouraged” in his field, Dr. Veit-Haibach says, and the PMCC inspires teamwork. “Everybody’s really collaborative and open to new ideas; that’s not always the case in places where



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I’ve been,” he says. “It can be more political.”

The fact that the new recruits at the PMCC have associations with institutions outside of Canada will benefit research there, says Dr. Veit-Haibach, who expects to connect with research fellows at the University of Zurich.

Dr. Domanski says that multidisciplinary research is “implicit” and “critical to any endeavour” in the field of cardiology. “There are few things that you can do without any appeal to colleagues in other areas, from biostatistics to cardiac surgery to clinical epidemiology.”

The people at the PMCC are particularly important, he says, including the philanthropists who make it happen.

“Those who finance this

operation do more for medicine than most physicians ever do,” he remarks. “Those people can buy a yacht and dock it in Monaco; instead, they’re making a difference in their community and internationally.”

Adds Dr. Domanski: “I would like the PMCC to be a hotbed of intellectual ferment and progress in research that improves public health. That’s what we’re all here for – to turn back the tsunami of heart disease.”

The new faces at the PMCC will bring “dramatic change in the way that we manage patients with heart disease,” Dr. Rubin predicts. “For all the investments that are made and all the science, the single most important thing here is the people we recruit – no question.”