

Research Committee: Building on excellence in 2001

The Canadian Association of Gastroenterology (CAG) Research Committee has been very active since the Canadian Digestive Diseases Week (CDDW) 2000 in Quebec City. Grant and fellowship competitions and planning for CDDW 2001 have kept committee members busy. As the new chair of the committee, I have come to realize the demands and challenges of the position. Thankfully, the previous chair, Dr Keith Sharkey, smoothed the road considerably before I took over, setting in place many of the programs that the committee now counts among its successes.

TRAINING PROGRAMS

In July 2000, 14 new fellows took up CAG fellowships. Successful relationships with our industry partners and the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) meant that we could distribute \$869,000 of new funding to Canada's young gastrointestinal scientists! Add to this the money already committed to CAG-AstraZeneca Research Initiative Awards and to the Summer Studentship program, and one finds that CAG and its partners contributed over \$1 million to gastrointestinal trainees in 2000. Our most recent fellowship competition involved evaluation of 24 applications from excellent candidates. The uniformly high quality of applicants has made the job of the Research Committee extremely difficult. Certainly, the awards that will be presented at CDDW 2001 in Banff will be going to truly outstanding young people.

GRANTS

A new initiative of the Research Committee this year has been to modify significantly the review procedure for our grants and fellowships. The CAG Research Committee

now acts as a de facto CIHR peer-review committee. CAG Research Committee reviews and scores are now the sole deciding factor for the approval of the New Investigator Establishment Award, the CAG-Abbott Operating Grant and the CAG Operating Grant. Working closely with the CIHR, we met in December to assess the grant applications from the autumn competition. Congratulations go to Dr Nathalie Vergnolle, University of Calgary, Calgary, Alberta (CAG New Investigator Award); Dr Anne-Marie Salapatek, University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario (CAG-Abbott Operating Grant) and Dr Nicola Jones, The Hospital for Sick Children, Toronto, Ontario (CAG Operating Grant). Each of these scientists submitted outstanding proposals for cutting edge work, and we look forward to seeing the results of their efforts in the years to come.

CDDW 2001

The Research Committee reviewed 206 abstracts submitted to this year's CDDW. Again, the high quality of the work submitted is a testament to the outstanding gastrointestinal research being conducted by CAG members in Canada. We also had a number of outstanding abstracts from abroad, indicating that CDDW is gaining an international reputation. The program for CDDW 2001 is available on the CAG Web site (<http://www.cag-acg.org>). You will see from the program that the schedule for this year's meeting is packed with a wide variety of symposia and other sessions that are sure to be of interest to both practitioners and scientists. Furthermore, the fact that no symposia overlap or are held during the evening will ensure that attendees get to see the presentations that are most important to them.

RECOGNIZING CAG'S BEST

Once again, the Research Committee had the opportunity to choose the recipients of the CAG Research Awards. This year's awardees are: Dr Mary Perdue, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario (Research Excellence Award); Dr Jon Meddings, University of Calgary, Calgary, Alberta (Visiting Professorship); and Dr Derek McKay, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario (Young Investigator Award). Congratulations to all!

FUTURE PLANS

The Research Committee has formulated a three-year strategic plan that has two main goals – to maintain the excellence of our existing programs and to develop new programs to meet the needs of CAG researchers. We will continue to work closely with the Finance Committee, the CIHR and

our industry partners to ensure the continuation of our flagship fellowship program. We will also be investigating the possibility of establishing a workshop funding program to support scientific workshops organized by CAG members. CAG funding would ensure that trainees and young investigators have the opportunity to attend workshops and symposia on new areas in gastrointestinal and gastroenterological science.

In summary, I look forward to working with the members of the CAG Research Committee and the membership at large to build on our past successes to ensure that CAG continues its prominent role in Canadian gastrointestinal research throughout 2001.

*Wallace MacNaughton PhD
Chair, CAG Research Committee*

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