

"The only thing I knew how to do was to keep on keeping on"

Bob Dylan

Hi Everyone,

Research is a critical and essential part of our academic mission. There is data to show that health centres that have a vital research component have better health outcomes for their clinical operations than centres that do not. A challenge in academia is how to evaluate research. Is it by number of publications? Impact factor? Citations ? H index? External operational and salary support awards? Invitations to speak? Invited papers in textbooks? The metrics available are numerous. One metric is external recognition and that is why this week's Departmental Acknowledgement goes to **Christine McCusker**.

Shortly before the New Year, a recent work of Christine's was recognized by Quebec Science as one of the **TOP 10 Scientific Breakthroughs of 2015**. Think about it. Top 10 across ALL disciplines and fields of investigations in a research intensive environment that is Quebec at this point in time.

Christine was recognized for her truly ground breaking work in the development of a novel vaccine, administered as a nasal spray, that works to redirect the immune response from developing potentially life-threatening allergies. It is based on her longitudinal work in identifying a small peptide that blocks an important component in the cascade of mounting an allergic response. I won't pretend to fully understand the molecular mechanisms (I am on record saying I should have paid more attention to immunology in medical school and residency; it is playing now an enormous role in our understanding of disorders in my own sub-specialty of neurology), but this vaccine enables the immune system to tolerate allergens. And the particular beauty is that it does so across the broad spectrum of potential allergens. This nicely ties together basic and clinical work and represents a novel use of the principle of vaccination.

Originally from Greater Toronto, Christine has a BSc and MSc degree in microbiology and immunology. She did her medical degree at McMaster and followed that with residency and fellowship training here in Pediatrics then Allergy & Immunology. Her fundamental lab is located within the Meakins-Christie component of the CTB at the Glen site (MUHC-RI). She has had a longstanding and extensive involvement in UGME as Co-Chair of the ID/Immunology Unit of the 'old' curriculum and present Chair of the "Defence Block in Med I of the 'new' curriculum. She also shoulders a significant administrative load as Division Director of Allergy, Immunology & Dermatology and Director of the hospital's Clinical Immunology Laboratory. I have always been impressed by her forthrightness, honesty and insightful creative thinking. She is not hesitant to tell you what she thinks and for the most part, she is right on the mark. She also readily responds to calls to serve on Departmental Committees (eg Promotions, Strategic Planning) willing to share her time and expertise. I appreciate this also in an era when I hear an all too often common refrain: "I'm too busy".

Please join me in congratulating Christine on this significant personal recognition. She is one of our quadruple threats (clinical, teaching, research & administration).

Have a great weekend.

Michael

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