New process created to choose centres

The first 7 were chosen by apparent whim. The new 11 have been selected by a hybrid new process, in which a measure of academic peer review was utilized to identify strengths and weaknesses of proposals but a committee of industrialists weighed the relative merits of competing applications for a new $163 million pot.

All told, the federal Progressive Conservative government continued to brand itself as a innovative dispenser of science monies as it unveiled the winners of a recent competition to create new Centres of Excellence for Commercialization and Research.

Like the predecessor 7 (*CMAJ* 2007; 176[10]:1406-7), the new 11 (Box 1) were selected outside of the standard process that the granting councils have traditionally used to determine which initiatives should be funded, in which scientific peers rate all applications against one another on the basis of excellence. Instead, the government opted to have a private sector advisory board weigh the relative merits of projects "because the focus was on commercialization," explains Networks of Centres of Excellence Senior Program Manager Jean Saint-Vil.

Some 110 applications were made under the competition to create centres in 4 designated "priority" areas: environmental science and technologies; natural resources and energy; health and related life sciences and technologies; and information and communications technologies.

Those were culled to 25 that were reviewed by standard peer review panels. But they did not rate the applications, Vil says. "The process was for them to really focus on identifying the strengths and weaknesses of each proposal."

The industrialists then weighed in with their recommendations, which were forwarded to the program steering committee for final approval. It was comprised of the presidents of the 3 granting councils and the Canada Foundation for Innovation, as well as the deputy minister of Industry Canada.

The private sector advisory board was chaired by Canadian Chamber of Commerce President and former Conservative cabinet minister Perrin Beatty. Members included: Amika Mobile Corporation President Sue Abu-Hakima; Bell University Laboratories Director Alan Bernardi; Syncrude Canada Ltd. former president James E.C. Carter; Fractal Capital Group President J. Haig deB. Farris; GlaxoSmithKline Inc. Director of Basic Research and Genetics Kevin O'Brien Fehr; Syncrude Canada Ltd former vice-president of technology project development and research Fred Hemphill; Innovatech Quebec former president Francine Laurent; IBM plant Bromont Director Raymond Leduc; Environmental Bio-detection Products Inc. President Donald Lush; Provincial Aerospace Group of Companies Vice-President Marketing Keith Stoodley and Tissue Regeneration Therapeutics Inc. Chief Executive Officer Jeff Turner. — Wayne Kondro, *CMAJ*

DOI:10.1503/cmaj.080306

Box 1: Centres of Excellence for Commercialization and Research

The 11 new centres divied up $163 million to develop new products for the market over the next 5 years. All but one received $14.95 million, while the centre for personalized medicine received $13.8 million.

The 11 recipients, directors and plans are:

- Advanced Applied Physics Solutions Inc., Vancouver, BC; Philip Gardner; develop a new underground imaging system for the natural resources sector and development of new technologies for medical isotope production.
- Bioindustrial Innovation Centre, Sarnia, Ont.; William Hewson; develop sustainable feedstocks like agricultural and forestry waste into renewable energy resources or value-added chemicals.
- Centre for the Commercialization of Research, Ottawa, Ont.; Ron Killeen; develop mechanisms to convert university research into technological products.
- Centre for Drug Research and Development, Vancouver, BC; Natalie Dakers; create "an infrastructure in which the therapeutic potential of medical discoveries can be better validated in the academic environment."
- Centre for Excellence in Personalized Medicine, Montréal, Que.; Carole Jabet; optimize "therapies by capitalizing on recent discoveries in genomics."
- Centre for Probe Development and Commercialization, Hamilton, Ont.; John Valliant; "create new molecular imaging probes, special chemical compounds that can diagnose disease early on or evaluate changes in the patient during treatment."
- Institute for Research in Immunology and Cancer/CECR in Therapeutics Discovery, Montréal, Que.; Guy Sauvageau; "accelerate" the development of targeted cancer therapies
- MaRS Innovation, Toronto, Ont.; Ilse Treurnicht; promote the creation of technology spin-off companies in academic setting
- The Prostate Centre's Translational Research Initiative for Accelerated Discovery and Development, Vancouver, BC; Martin Gleave; ongoing research.
- Pan-Provincial Vaccine Enterprise, Saskatoon, Sask.; Andrew Potter; promote growth and development of an indigenous vaccine industry
- CECR in the Prevention of Epidemic Organ Failure, Vancouver, BC; Bruce McManus; ongoing research on "biomarker-guided prevention and effective early detection of primary diseases" that lead to heart, lung or kidney failure.

News @ a glance

Task shifting: The World Health Organization has released global guidelines for "task shifting," or delegating tasks to less specialized health workers to free up the time of doctors and nurses. The guidelines, released Jan. 10, 2008, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, are aimed at helping nations respond to shortages of health care workers and are available at www.who.int.

The Botox blues: The US Food and Drug Administration has issued a warning that botulinum toxin, which is sold as popular antiwrinkle drugs under the brand names Botox, Botox Cosmetic and Myobloc, has been linked to botulism symptoms in some users, including cases in which children ultimately died after being given the drug for muscle spasms. The FDA said it is now investigating reports of illnesses in all age groups who used the drug for a range of