$12 Million in new funding for influenza research across Canada

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HALIFAX, NS – New funding of $12 million from GlaxoSmithKline plc (GSK) - a world-leading research-based pharmaceutical company - will support an additional three years of research, monitoring the effectiveness of seasonal influenza vaccines by tracking the incidence and severity of disease in adults hospitalized with influenza. The research will be conducted in forty hospitals across Canada comprising approximately 17,000 adult acute care beds, including sites in New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba, and British Columbia.

Researchers representing the Public Health Agency of Canada/Canadian Institutes of Health Research Influenza Research Network (PCIRN), announced the funding for the Serious Outcomes Surveillance (SOS) Network today in Halifax, where the national research will be led.

The PCIRN SOS Network began its work in 2009 with support from the federal agencies. The network is managed by a national team of investigators led by Dr. Shelly McNeil, an infectious disease specialist at Capital Health, Halifax, and Associate Professor, Dalhousie University. The QEII Health Sciences Centre and Dartmouth General Hospital are participating sites in Capital Health.

“This significant funding from GlaxoSmithKline will help ensure that the key infrastructure we began building three years ago will continue to serve Canadians,” said Dr. McNeil. “Specifically, funds will support the operation of surveillance sites at hospitals across Canada, as we focus on the evaluation of influenza and influenza vaccine effectiveness in the elderly.”

The PCIRN SOS Network also assesses the health and economic burden of influenza in Canadian adults, in order to best understand how vaccines can be used to prevent influenza disease in adults, and to understand risk factors for more severe disease. The research conducted by the Network can also be used to assess the effectiveness of new vaccines as they become available.

Dr. Ray LeBlanc, Vice President, Innovation and Learning at Capital Health, said “partnering with business helps support large-scale national research such as this with the potential to benefit all Canadians. “

“What we learn from clinical research evaluating the effectiveness of vaccines will make a difference not only to those at risk of serious complications from influenza, but can also help us reduce the burden on our health care systems across the country,” Dr. LeBlanc said. “We are proud to be leading this work at Capital Health.”
“We believe the research-based pharmaceutical industry should be part of the solution to the healthcare sustainability challenges that face Canadians,” added Paul Lucas, President and CEO, GlaxoSmithKline Inc. “And GSK is prepared to make investments in strong collaborations, like with PCIRN’s SOS Network for the influenza surveillance study, that will enhance our understanding of disease burden, help to demonstrate the value medicines and vaccines can bring to patients, and ultimately improve the healthcare system and the lives of patients across this country and around the world.”

Seasonal influenza (flu) is a common infection of the airways and lungs that can spread easily among humans. Influenza may be associated with serious complications such as pneumonia, especially in infants, the elderly and those with underlying medical conditions like diabetes, anemia, cancer, immune suppression, HIV and kidney disease. The Public Health Agency of Canada reports that on average, the flu and its complications send about 20,000 Canadians to hospital every year, and between 2,000 and 8,000 Canadians die.

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About PCIRN and the SOS Network
PHAC/CiHR Influenza Research Network (PCIRN), a national network of influenza vaccine researchers, develops and tests methodologies related to the evaluation of influenza vaccines as they pertain to safety, immunogenicity and effectiveness, and program implementation and evaluation. PCIRN is funded by a grant from the Public Health Agency of Canada and the Canadian Institutes of Health Research and was established in 2009. Currently more than 90 investigators at 30 institutions across Canada are involved in the network.

The Serious Outcomes Surveillance Network (SOS Network), an arm of PCIRN, is comprised of 40 adult hospital sites representing 17,000 acute care beds in seven provinces. The SOS Network is managed by a team of investigators led by Dr. Shelly McNeil, based at the Canadian Center for Vaccinology, a collaboration between Capital District Health Authority (CHDA), the IWK Health Centre and Dalhousie University.

About GlaxoSmithKline Inc.
GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) is a leading research-based pharmaceutical company with a challenging and inspiring mission: to improve the quality of human life by enabling people to do more, feel better, and live longer. This mission gives GSK the purpose to develop innovative medicines, vaccines and healthcare solutions that help millions of people. GSK is consistently recognized as one of the 50 best employers in Canada and is a top 15 investor in Canadian research and development, contributing more than $141 million in 2010 alone. With a proud tradition of charitable and community support, GSK is designated a Caring Company by Imagine Canada. Discover more at GSK.ca.

About Capital District Health Authority
Capital Health comprises: Addiction Prevention and Treatment Services; Capital District Mental Health Program; Centre for Clinical Research; Cobequid Community Health Centre; Community Health; Dartmouth General Hospital; East Coast Forensic Hospital; Eastern Shore Memorial Hospital; Hants Community Hospital; Integrated Continuing Care; Musquodoboit Valley Memorial Hospital; Nova Scotia Environmental Health Centre; The Nova Scotia Hospital; Public Health Services; Twin Oaks Memorial Hospital; and the QEII Health Sciences Centre.
The Capital Health District also encompasses seven volunteer Community Health Boards that advise Capital Health through the development of community health plans and encourage public participation in health planning. For more information, visit the Capital Health website: www.cdha.nshealth.ca.

About Dalhousie University
Dalhousie University, located in the heart of downtown Halifax, is a world-renowned educational institution providing exemplary leadership in academia, research, and community. At the forefront of leading research initiatives, Dalhousie boasts one of the best student-faculty ratios in Canada and is home to nationally and internationally celebrated faculty members. Across all three campuses, you’ll find diversity among students, variety among programs and opportunity for personal and professional growth.