



SASKATCHEWAN CANCER AGENCY

CUTTING-EDGE CANCER RESEARCH RECEIVES TRIPLE GRANT FUNDINGS

For Dr. Franco Vizeacoumar, Research Scientist at the Saskatchewan Cancer Agency, his work is never far from mind, and that dedication has recently been acknowledged with three Canadian Institutes of Health Research grants. This success has placed Saskatchewan in the second position with a provincial success rate in receiving grants of 17.78% next to British Columbia (19.61%).

"This is a significant accomplishment," said Dr. Jon Tonita, President and Chief Executive Officer for the Saskatchewan Cancer Agency. "It is rare for one researcher to receive multiple grants in one competition. We are in a new era of cancer research and I am pleased that our researchers are at the forefront of the work taking place."

The grants total more than \$1.7 million over a period of four and five years:

- A systematic genome wide effort to identify and validate targetable synthetic dosage lethal interactions of mitotic kinases in colorectal cancer cells. Principal Investigator: Franco Vizeacoumar, Co-Investigators: Andrew Freywald and Kristi Baker; five-year grant for \$592,875.
 - This grant focuses on targeting those genes whose loss of function can selectively kill specific cancer cells that overexpress certain tumor-specific factors. The successful outcome of this research could lead to new targeted therapies for colorectal cancer. Colorectal is the third most diagnosed cancer in women and second most diagnosed in men.
- Systematic profiling of circular RNAs essential for the survival of cancer cells. Principal Investigator: Franco Vizeacoumar, Co-Investigator: Ron Geyer; five-year grant for \$573,750.
 - Circular RNAs are just nucleotides of RNA arranged in the form of a circle. Much about the function of these molecules remains a mystery. Understanding the function of circular RNAs will help to determine how they can be used in the treatment of cancer. This research will aim to identify which circular RNAs are essential to maintain the cancer cell proliferation and explore their mode of action. The outcome of this work will help lead to the development of 'next' generation of therapeutic strategies in the treatment of cancer patients.
- Targeting the EphA2 receptor in triple-negative breast cancer. Principal Investigator: Andrew Freywald, Co-Investigators: Eric Price and Franco Vizeacoumar; four-year grant for \$558,452.
 - This grant aims to develop treatment strategies for triple-negative breast cancer by suppressing a molecule called EphA2. In collaboration with investigators at the University of Saskatchewan, Dr. Vizeacoumar aims to develop personalized combination therapy.

"I'm grateful to the support I have from my colleagues in the Cancer Agency and the partnership with researchers at the University of Saskatchewan," said Dr. Vizeacoumar. "Receiving the grants is not just my success, it's that of a much broader and talented team that are essential to the achievements of my lab."

Dr. Vizeacoumar's lab focuses primarily on identifying targetable vulnerabilities of cancer cells by exploiting tumour genetics.

"With this funding, we are able to continue our work in several areas that has the opportunity to translate into new and directed therapies and better outcomes for patients," said Dr. Vizeacoumar.

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