

Preventing cancer : What if research proved that the causes may be found in our environment

Jack Siemiatycki, Ph.D. is appointed Holder of the Guzzo Environment-Cancer Research Chair of the Université de Montréal

Montréal, June 3, 2008 – Thanks to research, significant progress was achieved in the fight against cancer over the last decades. The following are but a few examples of these achievements: identification of genes, even of viruses, responsible for cancer development; less invasive surgeries; more effective and targeted treatments that produce less undesirable side effects; and the marketing of drugs to help prevent cancer or relapse. Today researchers have a better understanding of the development and spreading of cancer cells. In addition, the quality of life during and after cancer treatments has improved, and we observe higher survival rates for many types of cancer.

Despite these accomplishments, which give hope for people afflicted with this disease, cancer is still the main cause of death in Quebec. With population ageing, the implementation of screening programs and early detection of cancers, the Province of Quebec will experience over the next few years a substantial increase in the number of cancer cases diagnosed. It is even estimated that soon one person out of two will be diagnosed with cancer during his or her lifetime.

And what if, aside from treating the disease, we would also attempt to prevent it by better understanding the impact of the environment – living environment and lifestyle – on our risk of developing cancer? This is precisely the research focus that the Faculty of Medicine at the Université de Montréal, The Cancer Research Society and the Guzzo Family had in mind when they created the *Guzzo Environment-Cancer Research Chair of the Université de Montréal*, and when they decided to appoint Mr. Jack Siemiatycki, a professor at the Department of Social and Preventive Medicine and a world-renowned epidemiologist, as holder of the Chair.

According to Dr. Siemiatycki: “Everyone agrees that among the four phases of cancer control – prevention, diagnosis, treatment and palliative care – the best and most humane approach is by far the prevention of the disease. However, it is unfortunately the area of cancer research that is the least developed and underfunded. There is obviously ambivalence between what people want and the efforts invested by the scientific community. It is important to underline the common contribution of the Guzzo Family and The Cancer Research Society because an initiative such as the Environment-Cancer Research Chair sends out a clear message: the environment and human health are both closely related and the issue of cancer prevention will, among other things, need to be based on research, which could be capable of identifying the agents and behaviours that can cause cancer.”

The Environment-Cancer Research Chair: A partnership based on expertise, experience, passion and generosity

According to Mr. Vincenzo Guzzo, Executive Vice-President & COO of Cinémas Guzzo, although it is important to improve treatment, it is crucial to find the causes of cancer so as to provide a more promising future for coming generations. “Having seen my father and mother struggle and win their battle over cancer motivated me to support cancer research. Our family is pleased and proud to put its name and business behind this research chair, and, above all, behind the work of Mr. Siemiatycki and his team”, says Mr. Guzzo. “We are delighted to be associated with partners as passionate and dedicated to

cancer prevention research as the Guzzo Family and The Cancer Research Society”, points out Mr. Luc Vinet, Rector of the Université de Montréal. “We wholeheartedly thank them for their ongoing support of the research conducted by Mr. Siemiatycki and his team, who are working to identify the environmental and occupational causes of this terrible scourge.”

Mr. Mario Chevette, Ph.D., President of The Cancer Research Society, adds: “For more than 60 years, The Cancer Research Society has supported the funding of basic cancer research exclusively and everywhere in Canada. At the end of 2006, it has broadened its focus with the creation of the Environment-Cancer Fund. The objectives that were being pursued when the Fund was established remain unchanged: 1) Adding the cancer prevention and epidemiology components to The CRS current grants program; 2) Investing in cancer prevention research, an area that is underfunded in Canada; 3) Gathering scientific evidence on environmental impacts and the risks of developing cancer; and 4) Promoting the participation of major financial partners in this research area that requires significant investments. The *Guzzo Environment-Cancer Research Chair of the Université de Montréal* is a source of pride for The Cancer Research Society because it represents the first major project of this Fund, which is dedicated exclusively to research that could shed light on the impact of the environment on the risk of developing cancer.”