

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **Dr. Stephen Robbins appointed Director of the Lady Davis Institute at the Jewish General Hospital**

*Renowned cancer scientist will assume leadership  
of one of Canada's most respected medical research institutes*

**Montreal (August 20 2020)** - Dr. Lawrence Rosenberg, President and CEO of CIUSSS West- Central Montreal, today announced the appointment of Dr. Stephen Robbins as Director of the Lady Davis Institute (LDI) at the Jewish General Hospital (JGH) in January 2021. Dr. Robbins also becomes a Professor in McGill University's Gerald Bronfman Department of Oncology, as well as an Associate Member in McGill's Department of Medicine. He will also hold the Glaxo Smith Kline Chair in Pharmacology at McGill.

"Dr. Robbins is a proven strategic leader and a renowned scientist with an established national and international reputation, and we are confident that he will enhance the LDI's already strong position as a leading Canadian biomedical research centre," said Dr. Rosenberg, who chaired the search committee.

"His career has spanned several interests, including immunology, genetics and cancer, which is particularly relevant, given that the LDI is home to more than 200 diverse scientists operating under four axes: cancer, epidemiology, molecular and regenerative medicine, and psychosocial aspects of disease."

Since 2013, Dr. Robbins has served as the Scientific Director of the Institute of Cancer Research at the Canadian Institutes of Health Research. He has been at the University of Calgary since 1996, where he is Professor in the Departments of Oncology and Biochemistry & Molecular Biology at the Cummings School of Medicine. He currently leads a research program that focuses on pre-clinical testing for brain tumours, inflammation and metastasis.

"I look forward to joining the great research community at the Lady Davis Institute," said Dr. Robbins. "I am very honored and humbled by the opportunity to lead this internationally recognized research institute with its strong history of research accomplishments, accolades and contributions to improving the health and well-being of people across Canada and beyond."

Dr. Robbins earned his Bachelor's degree in biology at York University in Toronto (1985) and his Ph.D. in microbiology and immunology from the University of British Columbia (1991). He pursued his post-doctoral work at the University of California at San Francisco (1991-1996) under Nobel laureate Dr. J. Michael Bishop. His previous leadership roles include Vice-Director (2007-2008) and Director (2009-2013) of the Southern Alberta Cancer Research Institute, and Associate Director, Research, of Alberta Health Services Cancer Care (2010-2013).

"We are so pleased that Dr. Robbins is joining our faculty," said Dr. David Eidelman, Vice-Principal (Health Affairs) and Dean of the Faculty of Medicine at McGill. "His research will flourish at McGill, and he is a welcome addition to our strong roster of oncology specialists."

Dr. Roderick McInnes, who has served with distinction as Director of the LDI since 2009, will continue in that role until the end of the year.

“Dr. McInnes has done an exceptional job over the past decade in reinvigorating scientific output at the LDI, recruiting a corps of dynamic young investigators, and streamlining the focus of the Institute’s intellectual interests,” said Dr. Rosenberg. “We are very grateful for his contributions, upon which we will continue to build for many years to come.”

Since its founding in 1969, the LDI has been an integral part of the Jewish General Hospital, with strong academic links to McGill University. Its scientists are highly regarded for their cutting-edge work in basic, translational and clinical research, with a focus on bringing discoveries from the lab bench to the bedside for the benefit of patients.

The Selection Committee for the new Director consisted of: Dr. Lawrence Rosenberg – President and CEO, CIUSSS West-Central Montreal (Chair); Dr. Gerald Batist – Deputy Director and Head of the Cancer Axis, LDI; Dr. Michel Bouvier – Director-General of IRIC at Université de Montréal; Bram Freedman – President and CEO, JGH Foundation; Dr. Philippe Gros – Deputy Vice-Principal, Research and Innovation, McGill University; Dr. Susan Kahn – Senior Investigator, LDI; Sandy Lalonde – Program Manager, FRQS (observer); Eric Maldoff – member, JGH Board of Governors and lawyer; Dr. Koren Mann – Head of the Molecular and Regenerative Medicine Axis, LDI; Dr. Samy Suissa – Head of the Clinical Epidemiology Axis, LDI; Dr. Josie Ursini-Siegel - Head of the Molecular Oncology Group, LDI; and Dr. Phylis Zekowitz - Head of the Psychosocial Axis, LDI.

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## **Backgrounder: Dr. Robbins' Research**

Dr. Robbins has had a long-standing interest in understanding the biochemical circuitry that controls cellular proliferation and differentiation, and how this circuitry goes awry in cancer. During his career he has taken a translational approach to research, including defining new therapies for malaria, discovering a novel class of anti-inflammatory agents, and identifying new therapeutic targets for brain tumours. In addition to maintaining a productive research program, he has been committed to teaching and has won several awards with respect to these activities at the University of Calgary.

The Robbins lab has had a long-standing interest in how extra-cellular signals are communicated to the cell to control such essential biological processes as the growth and differentiation of mammalian cells. It has been particularly interested in how this complex biochemical circuitry can go awry and how it can be targeted for therapeutic intervention in cancer. With a greater understanding of the molecular drivers of tumour progression, the Robbins laboratory has translated its findings using a wide range of pre-clinical models, with the ultimate goal of testing them in the clinic to improve patient outcomes.

Dr. Robbins' specific focus is in the area of hard-to-treat cancers including brain tumours and advanced metastatic disease with a specific focus on organ-specific metastasis. His studies have moved beyond the cancer cell, *per se*, and now include strategies to investigate how the tumour micro-environment fuels cancer-cell proliferation and imparts therapeutic resistance to current therapies.

The specific research areas in the Robbins laboratory include:

1. Therapeutically targeting the glioma disease reservoirs— namely, the brain tumour-initiating cells and the highly invasive cellular compartment. In this regard, it has isolated glioma targeting peptides that cross the blood-brain barrier and are currently being developed as a platform for imaging and therapeutic delivery.
2. Determining the role of the brain tumour micro-environment, including microglia and macrophages in glioma progression and their contribution to therapeutic resistance.
3. Based on the fact that most patients die from metastases rather than from their primary tumour, it is important to determine the molecular features of a cancer cell and the target organ that facilitate the metastatic process. The lab focuses on the vascular “addresses” that allow for the homing of cancer cells to specific organs in the body, with a particular focus on the liver and lungs, two major sites for metastatic spread.