

EDITORIAL: Shaw donation backs science research in Nova Scotia

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Leslie Shaw, left, and husband Allan listen during a presentation in Halifax last week thanking them for their \$1 million donation to the Dalhousie Medical Research Foundation. (CHRISTIAN LAFORCE/Staff)

Kudos to local philanthropists Leslie and Allan Shaw for their generous \$1 million donation to the Dalhousie Medical Research Foundation to support research on melanoma.

The incidence of melanoma — a deadly skin cancer, though highly curable if caught early — continues to rise across Canada. Nova Scotia's rates are among the highest in the nation. Melanoma killed more than 1,000 Canadians in 2014.

Some of the Shaws' funds announced Thursday are being used to buy new, cutting-edge medical equipment for diagnosing melanoma; the remainder will fund a research nurse co-ordinator and, in five years, a postdoctoral fellowship in melanoma research.

Dr. Richard Langley, director of research at Dalhousie Medical School's department of dermatology, said the gift has also led to provincial funding for a melanoma clinic at the QEII Health Sciences Centre.

News of plans to develop a world-class melanoma research program in Halifax comes on the heels of recent headlines celebrating other important scientific medical advances by Nova Scotia-based researchers.

Last week, we learned that Dalhousie University virologist Jennifer Corcoran had succeeded in isolating the gene in herpes virus-8 causing Kaposi's sarcoma.

That discovery could eventually lead to treatments for virus-related cancers. About 15 per cent of malignancies are caused by viral infections, according to the Yale Journal of Biology and Medicine.

Cases of Kaposi's sarcoma jumped in the 1980s, a rise linked to the HIV-AIDS epidemic. Newer anti-retroviral therapies have reduced those numbers, but it's still a problem for patients with suppressed immune systems.

The research might also help shed more light on an acknowledged connection between inflammation and cancer growth.

The previous weekend, this newspaper profiled Dalhousie graduate student Tynan Stevens' creation of computer algorithms that work with MRIs to map the human brain.

The young physicist has been working with the Biomedical Translational Imaging Centre, a research-dedicated medical imaging facility embedded in the IWK Health Centre and QEII Health Sciences Centre through a partnership.

The advance allows surgeons to map a patient's brain before neurosurgery so they can know beforehand precisely where critical functions, like speech or motor abilities, are located. Previously, surgeons had to rely on direct, live feedback from patients during the actual procedure.

These kinds of exciting developments in cancer and neurosurgery research are examples of the valuable advances in medical science occurring in Nova Scotia.

Thanks to the Shaws' transformational \$1 million gift for melanoma research, that capability has been further strengthened.

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