

Researcher getting to the heart of matter

St. Boniface General Hospital cardiologist lands MMSF grant for research

By: Simon Fuller

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Interventional cardiologist Dr. Amir Ravandi at St. Boniface General Hospital. (SIMON FULLER)

Getting to the heart of the matter is driving the research of a leading locally-based cardiologist who recently received a \$20,000 research grant.

Dr. Amir Ravandi, an interventional cardiologist at St. Boniface General Hospital, was recently named among 18 recipients from the Manitoba Medical Service Foundation's 2012 Competition for Funds.

The foundation — which is primarily supported by Manitoba Blue Cross — annually awards grants and professorships for medical and health-related research projects.

Ravandi — who wears different medical hats and has spent more than 20 years in some form of education and training — received his grant for the 'Role of Oxidized Phospholipids in Myocardial Ischemia and Reperfusion Injury.'

In layman's terms, Ravandi proposed a study to show the mechanism of heart damage and how certain molecules trigger healthy heart cells to die, and how that process can be inhibited and improve the function of the heart and improve quality of life after a heart attack.

"During the day, I wear two hats. I treat patients with narrowed arteries and also people having a heart attack of front of me," Ravandi said, noting the hospital and research institute is a world leader in heart care. "People benefit from around the world from the work done here."

"I put catheters into the heart to see where the narrowing or blockage (is) and then use balloons and stents and prevent the heart attack from going further. The faster we can get the heart open, the better the chance of survival," he added, noting age, diet, lifestyle and smoking rank among the factors for the potential of a heart attack.

Ravandi said the grant will help him continue his research — which includes looking at patient blood samples and animal models of heart attacks — in a world where mere minutes can be the difference between life and death.

"The part of research that excites me the most is the part that helps people," said Ravandi, who doesn't come from a medical background.

"As soon as I got to medical school, I knew I wanted to see very sick people and to make a difference in helping them right then and there."

MMSF's executive director Dr. Greg Hammond said potential grant recipients must meet certain criteria when seeking funding for a research project. The main requirement is that the research promotes scientific, educational or other activities for the maintenance and improvement of the health and well-being of Manitobans.

"There is a direct presentation of the proposed project, a question-and-answer session and a five-member panel. There are many examples of how dedicated and committed these young people are," Hammond said.

Hammond also emphasized a significant knock-on benefit of the grants.

"By encouraging these individuals, it encourages them to stay in Manitoba and use their skills to benefit Manitobans," he said.

Other areas of research covered by this year's grant recipients include antibiotics, identification of acute stroke, multiple sclerosis, obsessive compulsive disorder and youth homicide and injury.

To learn more about MMSF, visit www.mmsf.ca. To learn more about the hospital, see www.saintboniface.ca

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