

Victoria Heart Institute Foundation Plays Vital Role in Cardiac Health Care Research

Research involving people is critical to improving ability to provide the best health care.

Knowledge acquired through research improves our understanding of health care, particularly as it relates to the recovery from illness, injury or in managing a chronic condition or disease.

Through the Victoria Heart Institute Foundation, Victorians and Vancouver Islanders are fortunate to have some of the very best, leading edge of cardiovascular and stroke research being conducted in this area. The vast majority of the researchers and physicians work in general anonymity, but are driven by a constant desire to learn and to improve health care for their patients.

The Victoria Heart Institute Foundation is a non-profit charitable organization that supports a wide range of activities related to heart and stroke research: from carrying out clinical trials, providing education and learning opportunities for health professionals to sharing new knowledge through education and publishing the results of trials in medical journals. From the funds it has generated by providing a vehicle for such research, over the past few years the Institute has donated over \$1 million for equipment and medical supplies to Victoria area hospitals supporting improve care for patients with cardiovascular disease.

The Institute regards its commitment to protecting those who volunteer to participate in clinical trials as an item of greatest importance. Research conducted through the offices of the Institute is subject to ethics reviews and careful enrolment of volunteers, while the trials are stringently regulated by Health Canada and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. In addition, many Institute Board Members have backgrounds in reviewing and approving trials involving patient volunteers.

The volunteer patient consent process used by the Institute is extremely thorough. Before any volunteer can be enrolled, the Vancouver Island Health Authority's non-profit Ethics Review Board must approve the clinical trial. Patient volunteers are fully informed of the type and nature of the research being undertaken, how they might be involved and any known risks that may arise as a result of their participation. Each volunteer is encouraged to take time to carefully consider the patient's involvement before making a final decision. Once the patient has volunteered, the patient is kept informed and the health status of the patient is regularly monitored.

Clinical research is very expensive. Most trials are sponsored by pharmaceutical and medical device companies. Without this funding source a great deal of the research that is conducted would not occur.

It is important to recognize that sponsorship funding in the case of research conducted by the Institute, regardless of the source, is provided to the Victoria Heart Institute Foundation and does not go to individual physicians. These funds are the source of the endowment monies of the Institute, from which it provides for its operating expenses, the donations in equipment and medical supplies it has made and some small payments to physicians to compensate them for seeing patients. No payments are made to physicians for recruiting volunteers.

A significant portion of the operating funds that are expended by the Institute is used to support the training of physicians who have come from all over the world to study and learn in Victoria because the Institute has helped in the development and support of an environment of excellence in the fields of cardiovascular and stroke research and health care in this region.

There are of course many different types of clinical trials, some of which involve the use of new medical devices and techniques and others that test the use of pharmaceuticals. One area under current study by research conducted through the Institute is focused on improving procedures now in use for employing clot busting drugs in combination with angioplasty for people who are

having a heart attack. For a person suffering chest pains, the Institute is setting out to learn the most effective process for treatment involving the correct combination and sequencing for the use of clot busting drugs and angioplasty. Only clinically sound research can provide the answers that patients and doctors need to ensure that the best treatment methods are being used.

In another example of the Institute's research, a recent trial evaluated three treatments for abnormal heart rhythms. This was a landmark trial which showed people with heart failure lived longer when they received an implantable defibrillator. As a direct result of this research conducted by the Institute, physicians in Victoria now have a greater ability to identify and treat patients with heart failure at risk for sudden cardiac death.

Recently, the Institute offered to help support a hospital-based Rapid Assessment Unit and is helping to maintain a neurologist in the local hospital to facilitate an immediate response for stroke sufferers to provide early assessment and prevent further damage to the patient's health.

The Institute also sponsors a number of nurses and other health-care professionals each year to attend medical educational conferences that they might not otherwise have been able to attend, so they in turn can bring knowledge and experience back to our community.

We are proud and fortunate to have in Victoria one of the best cardiovascular programs and the Institute that promotes excellent research supporting continued improvement to health-care.

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