

Distinguished Clinician Scientist 2009



Fast track to CATCHing mini strokes in time

Neurologist Dr. Shelagh Coutts is on the fast track – she and her team are developing new brain scanning techniques for rapid and effective diagnosis of individuals having a stroke.

“Patients who may be having a mini stroke don’t always have access to an MRI to see what’s happening in the brain,” explains Dr. Coutts. “In order to visualize where and if there is a bleed or blockage in the brain, we are developing a combined approach using a CT scan together with an angiogram (injecting a dye into the bloodstream to visualize the blood vessels).”

Because time is of essence when dealing with a mini stroke or a transient ischemic attack (TIA), patients need to be diagnosed and treated as quickly as possible. Almost half of recurrent strokes occur within two days of the initial TIA.

“Since most emergency clinics have access to a CT scan, it will greatly improve the rate at which TIAs are diagnosed,” says Dr. Coutts. “As a result, patients will receive timely treatments and have much better outcomes.”

To support this innovative research, the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada has awarded Dr. Coutts the first ever Distinguished Clinician Scientist Award in partnership with the CIHR Institute of Circulatory and Respiratory Health and AstraZeneca Canada Inc.

The study is called CATCH. “Our goal is to see 400 patients with a TIA over the next three years and map their stroke with CTA (CT scan with angiography),” says Dr. Coutts. “Once we analyze the data, we’ll be in a better position to predict which patients are at a higher risk of having a second stroke.

“TIAs and mini strokes are a great opportunity to prevent a potentially deadly or devastating stroke,” says Dr. Coutts. “And with this accessible and non-invasive technology, we’re likely to have a significant impact on preventing major strokes.”



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