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SFU Research Takes Aim at Kidney Disease

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New funding will help Simon Fraser University cell biologist Lynne Quarmby in her search for ways to slow the onset of polycystic kidney disease (PKD). Quarmby is one of seven Simon Fraser University researchers who are recipients of a collective \$1.65 million in funding from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR). The funds are part of the CIHR's \$32 million investment to fund health research in B.C. An associate professor of molecular biology and biochemistry, Quarmby has identified a group of proteins that appear to play a key role in the development of kidney cysts, a condition of PKD, which affects about one in every 800 people.

Her study of how these proteins work will help to provide new targets for drug development to slow cyst growth and delay disease onset. Because there is no effective treatment, most PKD patients will eventually face dialysis or kidney transplant.

Quarmby says the discoveries which form the foundation of her latest project were made by graduate students working in her lab. The group has been investigating the assembly and disassembly of a finger-like appendage known as cilium, in a single-cell alga commonly found in ponds. "The structure and modes of assembly are virtually identical between this little alga and cells of the human kidney," Quarmby explains. Quarmby is currently continuing her research at a kidney laboratory at Toronto's Hospital For Sick Children, in order to "extend the work into the human realm as quickly as possible." Other SFU researchers receiving CIHR funds for health research are molecular biologists Lisa Craig, Esther Verheyen and Barry Honda; gerontologist Habib Chaudhury; Iraj Poureslami of the faculty of health sciences; and SFU business dean Ernie Love, for his Science to Business program.