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MEDIA RELEASE

SFU student nets cancer research award

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A Simon Fraser University health sciences student's research has helped break new ground in prostate cancer research and earned him a national award.

Mark Labrecque, the recipient of one of Prostate Cancer Canada's first five graduate studentship awards—the \$40,000 Robert C. Watson doctoral award—began studying the disease six years ago. His initial investigation of how benign prostate tumours can suddenly become malignant, spreading throughout the body, paralleled scientists' initial understanding of how gene reactions create prostate tumour cells.

Labrecque and his doctoral supervisor, Timothy Beischlag, an SFU health sciences associate professor, have been collaborating on some aspects of this research with Michael Cox, a senior scientist at the Vancouver Prostate Centre.

"We've identified a network of genes that work together to aid in blood vessel formation and make prostate cancer cells more metastatic," says Labrecque, who hopes the findings can be applied to other cancers.

"Now we're targeting the pathways to see if we can figure out some way to stop these processes from occurring."

Labrecque is grateful for the Prostate Cancer Canada award and appreciates the recognition. "To have a panel of experts look at our work and say that what we're doing is working and worth funding—well, that's positive reinforcement to continue," he says.

Prostate cancer currently affects one in seven Canadian men.

Researchers know that as prostate tumours grow they become too large for their supporting network of blood vessels, and become starved for oxygen and nutrients.

To circumvent this problem, the tumour cells start up genetic programs to grow more blood vessels, which then provide an avenue for tumour cells to travel through the circulatory system to other parts of the body.

Labrecque expects to complete his PhD research in the next year-and-half and then plans to apply to medical school.

"I'm hoping to specialize in oncology and then continue with research and have a medical practice on the side with a particular emphasis on prostate cancer."

Simon Fraser University is consistently ranked among Canada's top comprehensive universities and is one of the top 50 universities in the world under 50 years old. With campuses in Vancouver, Burnaby and Surrey, B.C., SFU engages actively with the community in its research and teaching, delivers almost 150 programs to more than 30,000 students, and has more than 125,000 alumni in 130 countries.

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