

Research Without Borders

International partnership promises research benefits

Technology makes international collaboration easier than ever, but it still takes teamwork to make research partnerships truly effective.

“I believe we’re a team,” says Chuck LaFlèche, St. Boniface Hospital Foundation’s President & CEO, of the charity’s emerging relationship with Ben-Gurion University of the Negev (BGU) in Beer-Sheva, Israel. “We have common research interests, similar approaches to fundraising, and – above all – a commitment to making people’s lives better.”

The “Research Without Borders” initiative was officially launched in September 2016 at the St. Boniface Hospital Albrechtsen Research Centre. The guest list included Professor Rivka Carmi, President of BGU, and Mark Mendelson, the Montreal-based National CEO of the Canadian Associates of Ben-Gurion University of the Negev.

“St. Boniface Hospital is a unique and exceptional institution,” says Mendelson. “When our researchers and administration learned more about St. Boniface Hospital and its projects, they immediately wanted to team up.”

The campaign goal is \$10 million. “It’s admittedly an ambitious target,” says LaFlèche, “but we know historically that our donors like international collaborations. There is no question that working closely with another institution accelerates research and opens doors to new discoveries. Our donors understand this.”

The relationship between St. Boniface Hospital and BGU was born in 2014 when Mendelson was in Winnipeg meeting with his local staff and volunteers. He was introduced to LaFlèche at an event and they soon realized there might be a remarkable opportunity for collaboration. By March 2015, LaFlèche and Dr. Grant Pierce, the Hospital’s Executive Director of Research, were visiting the BGU campus in Israel’s Negev Desert, hosted by Tova and Larry Vickar. Larry Vickar is a member of the Hospital Foundation’s Board of Directors and a supporter of both institutions.



Left to right: Mark Mendelson, National CEO of the Canadian Associates of Ben-Gurion University of the Negev; Professor Rivka Carmi, President of Ben-Gurion University; Dr. Grant Pierce, St. Boniface Hospital’s Executive Director of Research; and Chuck LaFlèche, St. Boniface Hospital Foundation’s President & CEO.

“Dr. Pierce and I were very impressed by what we saw. The research at BGU is outstanding and the enthusiasm for new technologies is inspiring,” says LaFlèche. “BGU also has a great deal of experience at bringing discoveries to market. We can learn from them, and I believe they can learn from us.”

Founded in 1969, BGU is widely regarded as a leading educational institute with high marks from the Centre for World University Rankings and the QS World University Rankings. The university is also among the top 100 in the world in receiving U.S. patents on their discoveries, and the only Israeli university invited to join the National Academy of Inventors.

The dollars raised will support three broad areas of research where each institution has demonstrated expertise: cardiovascular sciences; food sciences; and neurodegenerative research. Some possible areas of particular attention, notes Mendelson, include geriatric nutrition and autism. As the partnership blossoms and the work advances, the researchers will bring greater focus to the streams of research.

More than a few St. Boniface investigators will be involved in the work. As far as the fundraising goes, LaFlèche and the St. Boniface Hospital Foundation team will be joined by Mendelson and Zach Ostrove, the Executive Director of the Canadian Associates of Ben-Gurion University of the Negev in Winnipeg.

“This partnership with BGU is not our first international research and fundraising partnership, and it won’t be our last,” says LaFlèche. “This particular initiative is off to a wonderful and very promising start. It could become a model for future international collaborations for St. Boniface.”

To take international medical research to new levels, please support Research Without Borders. Call 204-237-2067 for more information.