



John Rennison, the Hamilton Spectator

Tucker Patterson and Dr. Mark Tarnopolsky

## Mac research chair aids push for neuromuscular breakthroughs

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A Hamilton doctor looking for the fountain of youth will spend more time in his lab after getting \$2 million in research funding.

Dr. Mark Tarnopolsky's work on how muscles function also holds hope of finding new treatments for neuromuscular and neurometabolic disorders.

Since many of the diseases are rare, it's hard to get research dollars to study them.

That's why the research chair at McMaster University, funded by Hamilton Health Sciences Foundation and announced yesterday, is so significant. "It allows us to get into really cutting-edge new therapies years before we could ever go through the painstakingly slow process of going to granting agencies, which are massively underfunded," said Tarnopolsky.

"For an orphan disease that affects so few people, it's just not high priority so it's very hard to do that kind of research.

"But with donations from patients who have an interest and with the ability now with this chair, we can get into areas very rapidly and start making a difference for people."

Researchers in the field say Tarnopolsky richly deserves the honour and the funding.

"He has a reputation around North America as being the guy to go to for people who have these rare diseases," said Dr. Brian Robinson, Canada Research Chair in vascular and metabolic biology and a specialist at Toronto's Hospital for Sick Children.

Tarnopolsky is the only physician in Canada to focus the majority of his practice on mitochondrial diseases. Mitochondria are the powerhouses of muscle cells that convert food and oxygen into energy.

That focus has led to him to discover innovative treatments and avenues to study neuromuscular disease and also, possibly, to slow aging.

His work is unique because he treats both children and adults.

Most doctors do one or the other.

He isn't focused just on far-off cures but on how best to treat patients now.

"The goal of our clinic is to help people today," said Tarnopolsky.

"Let's try to deal with every possible thing we can do to improve someone's function and to improve their quality of life."

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