

BUILDING BRIDGES TO BREAKTHROUGHS

JANUARY 2023

Driving Innovation in Mental Health Research

Impact Update on the Deeda Blair Research Initiative for Disorders of the Brain

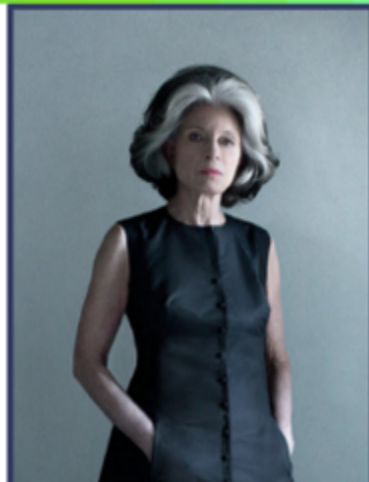
David Ross is on a mission to modernize psychiatric education for the next generation of mental health practitioners. Christopher Bartley is upending research on schizophrenia. Both of these visionaries have moved forward in their trajectory thanks to one individual deeply involved in the future of mental health—Deeda Blair.

Mrs. William McCormick Blair, Jr., a member of the FNIH Board of Directors, established the Deeda Blair Research Initiative for Disorders of the Brain in 2021 to provide flexible, unrestricted funding to physician-scientists who are exploring innovative ideas that could challenge and potentially transform current approaches to mental illness. The initiative is a tribute to her son, who struggled with depression and anxiety as a young adult and eventually took his own life.



“This program is to support young researchers with exceptional promise who will explore creative new ideas and even high-risk disruptive research to accelerate new targets and innovative approaches.”

DEEDA BLAIR



We caught up with two of the three inaugural award recipients to learn of their accomplishments over the last few years:

David Ross, MD, PhD, while associate residency director at Yale University, co-founded the innovative National Neuroscience Curriculum Initiative (NNCI) to transform the medical educational model, create tools to help psychiatrists and other mental health professionals integrate cutting-edge neuroscience into clinical practice, and ultimately provide better care to patients. As the NNCI grew in reach and reputation, Dr. Ross was recruited to become professor and chair of the Psychiatry Department at the University of Alberta.

“Psychiatry is a very old field, more than a century, but for most of that time we’ve had no understanding of the actual biology of psychiatric illnesses,” said Dr. Ross. “Only in the last 20 to 30 years have we had the tools that could allow us to study the brain in a rigorous way. Modern neuroscience research has the potential to redefine how we think about illnesses, how we treat illnesses, how we engage with people publicly. Up until very recently, this new research simply wasn’t translating into the clinical practice of psychiatry.”

With the funding from the Blair Research Initiative, Dr. Ross was able to greatly expand the range of faculty development and learning opportunities through the NNCI, which now includes interactive classroom sessions, sample case studies, brief accessible reviews, clinical commentaries on individual psychiatric concepts, and short videos on “cool stuff.”

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Announcement: Four New Awardees of the Deeda Blair Research Initiative

The FNIH is pleased to announce the second round of recipients for the Deeda Blair Research Initiative for Disorders of the Brain. Read about four physician-scientists who are pursuing innovative research that may transform approaches to mental illness.

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Using Donated Drugs to Change Lives



Children with the rare genetic disease known as chronic granulomatous disease (CGD) have an immune system that fails at fighting off bacteria and fungi. They suffer frequent and life-threatening infections, as well as inflammatory problems in their tissues and organs caused by a build-up of granulomas, or hard lumps formed by white blood cells at the infection site.

One hope for these children is ACTIMMUNE, or interferon gamma-1b, a drug that lowers the risk of serious infection in people with CGD when combined with antibiotics and antifungals. In addition, it is often through treating rare diseases that medical teams can uncover a deeper understanding of the potential utility of a medicine in new areas.

Last fall, Horizon Therapeutics committed to donate through the FNIH more than 1,400 vials of ACTIMMUNE to treat patients participating in clinical trials at the NIH Clinical Center, with approximately half of the committed donation delivered to the Clinical Center in December 2022.

Horizon Therapeutics delivers medicines for rare, autoimmune, and severe inflammatory diseases and provides compassionate support to patients. They, as well as other pharmaceutical and biotechnology companies, have made donations through the FNIH-coordinated In-Kind Drug Donation Program to provide for effective care of diseases with no clear treatment guidelines, while freeing up NIH resources to support cutting-edge research.

“When we come together, we have a stronger voice, make a bigger difference and leave a lasting impact in patient care,” said Jeffrey W. Sherman, MD, FACP, Executive Vice President, Chief Medical Officer, Horizon. “By partnering with the FNIH and supporting the Clinical Center In-Kind Drug Donation Program, clinical teams can allocate resources where they are needed most, ensuring patient care while having the opportunity to expand the scientific knowledge around other rare diseases. Many of us are a patient, know a patient, or have been touched by a patient’s story, driving our passion to collaborate in new ways because we know every day matters.”

Since 2019, Horizon has committed to making in-kind donations valued at a total of \$19.2 million to the NIH Clinical Center.

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