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JENNIFER SULLIVAN
O'Donnell Agency
(561) 832-3231

jennifer@theodonnellagency.com

VGTI Florida Receives \$100,000 Grand Challenges Explorations Grant for Ground-Breaking Research in Global Health and Development



Port St. Lucie, Fla. (May 2, 2011) – The Vaccine & Gene Therapy Institute (VGTI) of Florida announced today that it is a [Grand Challenges Explorations](#) winner, an initiative funded by the [Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation](#). Assistant member and principal investigator, Nicolas Chomont, Ph.D. will pursue an innovative global health and development research project, titled “Combining HAART and HIV immunization to eradicate HIV.”

Grand Challenges Explorations (GCE) funds scientists and researchers worldwide to explore ideas that can break the mold in how we solve persistent global health and development challenges. Dr. Chomont’s project is one of over 85 Grand Challenges Explorations Round 6 grants announced last week by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

“GCE winners are expanding the pipeline of ideas for serious global health and development challenges where creative thinking is most urgently needed. These grants are meant to spur on new discoveries that could ultimately save millions of lives,” said Chris Wilson, director of Global Health Discovery at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

To receive funding, Dr. Chomont and other Grand Challenges Explorations Round 6 winners demonstrated in a two-page online application a bold idea in one of five critical global health and development topic areas: polio eradication, HIV, sanitation and family health technologies, and mobile health. Applications for the current open round, [Grand Challenges Explorations Round 7](#), will be accepted through May 19, 2011.

Dr. Chomont is an internationally recognized expert in HIV and AIDS research. His work has been acknowledged with a number of prestigious awards, including an American Foundation for AIDS Research post-doctoral fellowship. He also earned a post-doctoral fellowship from the Louis Pasteur Foundation in Canada, and a fellowship from the National Agency for AIDS Research in France. Dr. Chomont’s Grand Challenges Explorations grant research will determine if the stimulation of latently infected cells with HIV antigen is a potent strategy to eradicate the HIV reservoir. This study will constitute a proof-of-concept for the development of a clinical trial aimed at curing HIV by combining Highly Active Antiretroviral Therapy (HAART) and immunization with HIV antigens.

About Grand Challenges Explorations

[Grand Challenges Explorations](#) is a US\$100 million initiative funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Launched in 2008, Grand Challenge Explorations grants have already been awarded to nearly 500 researchers from over 40 countries. The grant program is open to anyone from any discipline and from any organization. The initiative uses an agile, accelerated grant-making process with short two-page online applications and no preliminary data required. Initial grants of \$100,000 are awarded two times a year. Successful projects have the opportunity to receive a follow-on grant of up to US\$1 million.

About VGTI Florida

VGTI Florida is a world-class research institute in Port St. Lucie, Fla. that focuses on studying the human immune system to prevent and treat chronic infectious diseases, cancer and ailments that disproportionately affect aging populations. The Institute's researchers have contributed to significant advances in the development of vaccines and other therapeutics to fight diseases such as AIDS, melanoma, breast cancer, prostate cancer, yellow fever and dengue fever. VGTI Florida is an independent 501(c) 3 nonprofit organization that is related to the Vaccine and Gene Therapy Institute at Oregon Health & Science University in Beaverton, Ore. For more information, please visit www.vgtifl.org.