For Immediate Release

Dr. Rick Austin: Inaugural holder of the AMGEN Canada Chair in Nephrology at McMaster University and St. Joseph’s Healthcare Hamilton

December 5, 2008—Hamilton, ON
Today, St. Joseph’s Healthcare Hamilton (SJHH) and McMaster University announced that internationally-renowned scientist and researcher, Dr. Rick Austin, has been appointed the inaugural holder of the AMGEN Canada Chair in Nephrology.

The endowed chair was established in March 2007 through a $3 million investment made by the Canadian division of AMGEN—a leading human therapeutics company in the biotechnology industry. The AMGEN Canada Chair in Nephrology supports the translational research mandate of St. Joseph’s Healthcare Hamilton and McMaster University by moving findings from lab bench to bedside.

During his open-ended term as the AMGEN Chairholder, Dr. Austin plans to pursue research into the causes of, and treatments for atherosclerosis: a hardening of the arteries that is often seen in patients living with kidney disease. Work in Dr. Austin’s laboratory has identified the defining role of the endoplasmic reticulum (ER) stress response pathway, in endothelial cell dysfunction, and the accelerated development of atherosclerosis (hardening of the arteries). Furthermore, Dr. Austin and his research group have demonstrated that this stress pathway is also involved in the pathological changes observed in chronic kidney disease. He and his research team are actively investigating strategies to inhibit the ER stress response pathways as a potential therapy to prevent or delay the onset of cardiovascular disease in kidney disease sufferers. This is a very important clinical research initiative given that virtually all patients with chronic kidney disease, particularly those with diabetes, suffer from life threatening cardiovascular disease.

Dr. Austin is a molecular/cellular biologist and holds the position of Professor of Medicine in the Division of Nephrology at McMaster University. He is also a Career Investigator of the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Ontario. In March 2008, he was appointed holder of McMaster’s AMGEN Canada Chair in Nephrology at St. Joseph’s Healthcare Hamilton.
At this morning’s public announcement of that appointment, Dr. Austin remarked: “I am humbled and excited by this opportunity to pursue an avenue of research that will have a tangible impact on the lives of so many. It’s what all of us in the field of healthcare and clinical research strive to do...discover how we can positively impact the lives of patients by furthering our understanding of illness and disease. As a scientist, and as a human being, I couldn’t ask for more than that. I truly enjoy the challenges and satisfaction of building a solid research program that will enhance the quality of life for many of our family and friends that suffer from kidney disease and its complications.”

“When a disease afflicts so many patients, it is incumbent upon all of us to do what we can to ensure top calibre researchers like Dr. Austin have the resources they need to discover the causes of, and best treatments for kidney disease,” said Dr. Daniel Billen, Vice-President and General Manager at AMGEN Canada. “At AMGEN, our mission is to serve patients and we are committed to science as the means of helping patients fight serious illness. We are proud to support this ground-breaking research.”

Nephrology is a medical specialty focused on the study of the kidney, its structure, function and the diseases and ailments that can affect its proper functioning. Currently, almost 2 million Canadians are estimated to have, or be at risk for kidney disease. Every day, as many as 14 Canadians learn their kidneys have failed and over 17,000 Canadians are currently on dialysis.

St. Joseph’s Healthcare Hamilton (SJHH) is the regional specialized centre for end stage renal (kidney) disease and dysfunction for Central South Ontario, and serves the residents of Hamilton, Brant, Halton, Niagara, Haldimand, and Norfolk with transplantation and dialysis treatment. McMaster University is renowned both as a research-intense university and as the home for educational innovation. The Division of Nephrology is one of the fastest-growing research and clinical care programs at St. Joseph’s Healthcare and McMaster University.

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