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Providence Health Care Announces Launch of Phase I, Non-Oncology Clinical Trials Unit at Mount Saint Joseph Hospital

CTU Participant Room

Phase I clinical trials are the essential first step in testing new drugs in humans, after they have been developed and tested in pre-clinical models. Phase I, or first-in-human, trials must be administered under closely controlled conditions and protocols, in an in-patient setting with "Code Blue" capabilities. Successful Phase I clinical trial results lead to more extensive Phase II – IV trials, with the goal of ultimately achieving regulatory approval for the new drug.

The growth of the B.C. health research and clinical trials sector over the past decade has generated strong interest in establishing a Phase I Clinical Trials Unit (CTU). Outside of cancer-related drugs, the lack of Phase I clinical trials facilities is recognized as a serious "bottleneck" for the province in transitioning from laboratory/pre-clinical-based research to human clinical research. This means that currently, local companies have to conduct this crucial early phase of drug development outside of B.C., causing valuable health care discoveries, talent, and potential revenue, to leave the province.

Now, after years of planning and construction, Providence Health Care is pleased to announce that the Phase 1 CTU at Mount Saint Joseph Hospital (MSJH) will be opening for business in June 2025. The CTU will augment the outstanding research undertaken at PHC, while facilitating innovative medical treatments for better health outcomes for patients in B.C. and across the country.

Construction and operations of the CTU has been enabled by $4.2M from the Government of B.C. along with $600K from Michael Smith Health Research BC, and because of this vital investment, B.C. 's life science community can expand and further enhance high-quality clinical research opportunities for the region.

The new CTU will enable the province to support the full lifecycle of drug and therapy development – driving innovation, expanding research and development, and accelerating growth in the life sciences sector.

"Hard work and lobbying got us to this point, and this persistent effort will have lasting implications on the growth and influence of B.C.'s life science sector. It is an acknowledgment and accomplishment for our community which recognized a vision, to advance our research to new levels of understanding and more importantly, better patient outcomes." said Dr. Darryl Knight, VP of Research and Academic Affairs at PHC and President of the Providence Health Care Research Institute, Providence Research.

Dr. Darryl Knight

Nurse Coordinator Room

Establishing a Phase I CTU, not focused on oncology, is a strategic asset for B.C.'s life sciences sector. Its function will address a critical gap in early-stage development of therapeutic modalities particularly in areas such as heart, lung and kidney diseases, infectious diseases, metabolic and endocrine disorders, and rare diseases.

The CTU at MSJH will operate through a collaborative hybrid model between PHC and the Critical Care program at MSJH. Critical care at PHC hosts some of the most highly skilled clinicians in Canada, ensuring participant safety. Highly trained nursing and research staff will ensure seamless protocol execution and generate robust, high-quality research data.

"This resource will be a nimble, deeply skilled unit which will concretely link the region's top researchers and life sciences companies, catalyzing the start-up and scale-up phases of commercialization for pharmaceutical and biomedical discoveries." said Interim Medical Director of the CTU and Head of Critical Care at PHC, Dr. John Boyd. The CTU consists of eight participant beds and for a comfortable overnight inpatient experience, trial participants will have access to a lounge area featuring a kitchenette, dining table, couch, communal TV, and 24/7 staffing.

Central to the inclusion and support of any participants in a Phase I trial, is the rigorous vetting of healthy volunteers. All trials involving healthy volunteers must be reviewed by a Research Ethics Board to ensure that risks are minimized and reasonable, volunteers are fully informed and consent freely, with privacy and confidentiality protected.

On the importance of healthy volunteers participating in clinical trials, Julie Hadden, Director, Clinical Research Administration, says, "Phase I trials are driven by the courage and selflessness of volunteers who step forward—often without the promise of personal benefit—to help pioneer new medical therapies. This initial stage of clinical research marks the starting point of scientific breakthroughs, where hope, humanity, and

CTU multi-purpose room

The CTU at MSJH will:

- **Accelerate** drug development by enabling early human testing for safety, dosage, and pharmacokinetics.
- **Strengthen** the local life sciences ecosystem by attracting industry partners, fostering collaboration, and driving investment.
- **Enhance** regulatory readiness through Health Canada compliant studies that streamline approval pathways.
- **Support** workforce and economic development by creating high-value jobs and training opportunities.
- **Improve** public health access to innovative treatments while contributing more representative clinical data.
- **Offer a competitive advantage** by reducing reliance on other jurisdictions' trial sites and expediting go-to-market strategies.

innovation converge."

For healthy volunteer studies, the CTU is actively building a database of individuals interested in participating in clinical trials via the REACH BC platform. As of May 2025, more than 180 individuals have registered.

Research staff are available to support investigators with protocol review, ethics submissions, contract and budget negotiations, staff scheduling, hospital department coordination, participant recruitment, and more.

Mrs. Lena Legkaia, Research Operations Manager for the MSJH CTU, is responsible for CTU day-to-day operations. With extensive experience in diverse clinical research settings, including Phase I trials, her expertise will be central to the successful operation of the unit, while guiding both volunteers and researchers through the research process. Ms. Danica Perng will provide valuable support as the unit's Research Assistant.

Mrs. Lena Legkaia

For CTU inquiries please email:
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