

PRESS RELEASE

HBKU faculty receive QNRF funding toward Parkinson's disease and breast cancer research

Doha, 11 July 2015 –Hamad bin Khalifa University, a member of Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development, has won two Qatar National Research Fund (QNRF) grants to support research efforts under its College of Science and Engineering. Each grant is awarded for a period of three years and focuses on an important area of biomedical and biological science research being undertaken in Qatar, with one grant supporting research into Parkinson's disease and the other supporting research into breast cancer. As the university continues to value and encourage innovative research into issues of local and global concern, the projects aim to enhance chances of early detection and successful drug treatment.

Dr. Omar El-Agnaf, Professor of Life Science at HBKU's College of Science and Engineering, will be the Lead Principal Investigator on a project that will better define key biomarkers of Parkinson's disease, a chronic condition that results from the degeneration of nerve cells in a central part of a sufferer's brain. Dr. El-Agnaf and his team will explore mechanisms for early diagnosis that aim to help make it possible for doctors to intervene with protective and preventive therapy before the disease progresses, and allow for better management of the condition.

Dr. El-Agnaf's previous research into Parkinson's disease and other neurodegenerative diseases, such as Alzheimer's disease is extensive, and he is considered a pioneer in this field. Several patented inventions have emerged from research carried out in the UK and the Gulf region, and his discoveries have offered many new opportunities for the development of novel diagnostic and therapeutic tools.

Commenting on the funding and explaining the objective of the research, Dr. El-Agnaf said: "Despite progress in understanding the underlying disease mechanisms of Parkinson's and related diseases, there remains an urgent need to develop methods for use in diagnosis. Developing such methods is important not only from a patient standpoint, but in terms of research and clinical trials. I am very pleased that the QNRF has decided to support research that is targeted at helping develop a simple diagnostic test that will aid the clinical diagnosis of Parkinson's and related diseases. The financial backing will greatly help us move forward with our investigations."

The second grant awarded to the department is for research led by Dr. Imed Gallouzi, Professor of Life Science at HBKU's College of Science and Engineering, as Lead Principal Investigator, in collaboration with Weill Cornell Medical College in Qatar's Dr. Lotfi Chouchane as Principal Investigator. QNRF-backed project will expand on Dr. Gallouzi's initial research and work to identify novel protein players in promoting the death of breast cancer cells and tumors. If successful, the project will offer key insight into combatting the disease and aid doctors and practitioners treating breast cancer patients.

Dr. Gallouzi joined HBKU in 2014, bringing with him a strong history in cellular research relating to cancer. In 2000 he co-discovered stress granules within cells and in 2012 his observations connecting

stress granule formation to the prevention of cancer-induced muscle was selected by the Canadian Cancer Society Research Institute as one of the top ten findings of the year.

Dr. Gallouzi commented: “I am very grateful to QNRF for the grant. This financial support will allow my research group to continue its work on delineating the causes behind the onset of breast cancer, one of Qatar’s grand challenges in health research. I am also very proud that the quality of research that will be performed in the laboratory at HBKU has been recognized by my peers in Qatar and by a prestigious funding agency such as QNRF.”

The two research projects receiving QNRF grants form part of the ongoing development of HBKU’s College of Science and Engineering, which later this year will welcome the first cohort of master’s and Ph.D. students to join its Sustainable Energy, Sustainable Environment, and Biomedical and Biological Sciences programs, as well as its first cohort of undergraduate computer engineering students.

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About Hamad bin Khalifa University

Hamad bin Khalifa University (HBKU), a member of Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development, is an emerging research university building upon unique collaborations with local and international partners. Located in Education City, HBKU seeks to provide unparalleled opportunities for scholarship, teaching, discovery, and learning for all of its students through an array of interdisciplinary programs.

HBKU’s partners are Virginia Commonwealth University in Qatar, Weill Cornell Medical College in Qatar, Texas A&M University at Qatar, Carnegie Mellon University in Qatar, Georgetown University School of Foreign Service in Qatar, Northwestern University in Qatar, HEC Paris in Qatar, and UCL Qatar.