



For Immediate Release — Friday, October 12, 2018

Alberta RNA Research and Training Institute welcomes Gairdner winner for RNA and Epigenetics Symposium

The University of Lethbridge's Alberta RNA Research and Training Institute (ARRTI) is thrilled to host Dr. Azim Surani, recipient of the 2018 Canada Gairdner International Award, for a public speaker event on **Friday, October 19, 2018**. This marks the sixth consecutive year that the University has had the opportunity to present a Gairdner Laureate.

Surani is the director of Germline and Epigenetics Research, Wellcome Trust Cancer Research UK Gurdon Institute and a Marshall-Walton Professor, University of Cambridge. He is one of five 2018 Canada Gairdner International Laureates and, along with Dr. David Solter, has been recognized for the discovery of mammalian genomic imprinting and its consequences for development and disease. When imprinting goes wrong, it can lead to developmental, physiological and behavioural anomalies in mice, and result in diseases in humans, such as developmental syndromes like Beckwith-Wiedemann, Angelman and Prader-Willi, and a variety of cancers and neurological disorders.

The work by Drs. Surani and Solter is one the key discoveries that started the field of epigenetics, the study of heritable changes in gene function without changes in the DNA sequence.

"It is exciting to learn about the recent progress on the role of DNA modification in development of organisms and how the inappropriate DNA modifications lead to diseases such as cancer," says Dr. Trushar Patel, a researcher and professor in the U of L's Department of Chemistry & Biochemistry. "Dr. Surani has also studied the role of specific DNA elements that change their location in the genome of organisms which can either have positive or negative consequences on the survival of the cell."

The Canada Gairdner Awards are often seen as a precursor to the Nobel Prize, which was well illustrated this year as two of the new Nobel Laureates are also Gairdner Laureates. Dr. James P. Allison was awarded the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine after receiving the Canada Gairdner International Award in 2014, and Sir Gregory Winter was awarded the Nobel Prize in Chemistry after receiving the Canada Gairdner International Award in 2013.

“The Canada Gairdner Awards are Canada’s most esteemed biomedical awards, recognizing the researchers of the world that are making a positive impact on human health,” says Dr. Hans-Joachim Wieden, director of ARRTI. “We are very fortunate to be able to bring such a researcher to our campus, to speak on his research and inspire our students.”

One of the main goals of the Gairdner Foundation program is to inspire the next generation of researchers by giving high school students the opportunity to hear from and interact with the world’s leading researchers.

“Scientists are normal people, but some scientists like the Gairdner awardees have made extraordinary scientific discoveries,” says Dr. Ute Kothe, a professor in the Department of Chemistry & Biochemistry. “It will therefore be very inspiring for the students at École La Vérandrye to get to know Dr. Surani in person and to hear about his life in a presentation entitled, *Out of Africa to a Career in Science*.”

Surani’s visit to the U of L will include a public keynote lecture to kick off a symposium focused on RNA and Epigenetics. His lecture, *From genomic imprinting to the human germline*, will take place at **1:30 p.m. on Friday, October 19 in the Markin Hall Atrium**. The lecture is followed by a series of lightning talks by local and visiting researchers in the fields of RNA and Epigenetics.

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