

## **Lawson Researchers Join Canada's Elite**

*Drs. Gregor Reid and Michael Strong Inducted into Academy of Health Sciences*

Dr. Gregor Reid, Assistant Director at Lawson Health Research Institute (Lawson) and Dr. Michael Strong, Scientist at Lawson and Robarts Research Institute (Robarts) at The University of Western Ontario (Western), have been inducted to the Canadian Academy of Health Sciences (CAHS). The induction ceremony took place during the Annual Meeting of CAHS in Ottawa on September 21, 2009, where Reid and Strong were recognized for great accomplishment and achievement in academic health sciences in Canada.

The CAHS exists to provide timely, informed and unbiased assessments of urgent issues affecting the health of Canadians. The Academy also represents Canada on the InterAcademy Medical Panel (IAMP), a global consortium of national health science academies whose aim is to alleviate the health burdens of the world's poorest people, build scientific capacity for health and provide independent scientific advice on promoting health science and health care policy to national governments and global organizations.

### **Strengthening the Foundation of Probiotics Research in Canada**

Dr. Reid (seen below with Senator Michael Kirby who was also inducted), Professor at the Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry (Schulich) at Western, is world-renowned for his research into probiotics. In 2001, his work led Reid to establish the Canadian



Research & Development Centre for Probiotics at Lawson. The centre has since become internationally recognized for its probiotic research and pursuit of excellent basic, discovery, developmental and translational research leading to tangible benefits for humans.

The application of Reid's work is global, with studies in South America, Europe and Africa. As part of Western Heads East, a volunteer organization established at Western, probiotic yogurt production has been transferred to a community in Mwanza, Tanzania. There, local mamas make the probiotic yogurt for around 350 people each day, including over 125

living with HIV/AIDS. Studies by Reid's students have shown that the yogurt improves nutrition, improves immune parameters, and reduces fatigue and diarrhea. A recipient in 2008 of an Honorary Doctorate from Orebro University in Sweden, Reid has been involved with studies around the world, including Brazil, USA, Holland, Nigeria, Russia, and Croatia. Earlier this year, Reid received a \$7 million endowed research Chair in Human Microbiology and Probiotics from Danone, presented at the St. Joseph's dinner with Nobel Laureate Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

“To be inducted into the Canadian Academy of Health Sciences is not only a wonderful personal honour, but it’s also recognition that studies on beneficial bacteria are being regarded as important,” says Reid. “I look forward to working alongside some of Canada’s most influential icons in the health sciences community to expand our understanding of indigenous and probiotic microbes that are critical to life and health.”

### **Changing the Perception of ALS Research through Discovery**

Dr. Strong is Chief of Neurology and Co-chair of the Department of Clinical Neurological Sciences at London Health Sciences Centre and Schulich and also holds the Arthur J. Hudson Chair in ALS Research. In 2005, Strong was awarded the Sheila Essay Award from the American Academy of Neurology for his research into the pathogenesis of ALS. He was awarded the Forbes Norris Award for ALS research and patient care in 2008, and is the only Canadian to hold both major international awards.

Strong’s research laboratories are centred at the Robarts, where he has focused on understanding the basic cellular mechanisms of ALS. His work has led to an understanding of the process by which intracellular deposits of protein (composed primarily of neurofilament) are formed, and how these aggregates contribute to the disease process of ALS. Strong’s laboratory has defined novel mRNA binding proteins that contribute to alterations in the stability of neurofilament mRNA in ALS and has been instrumental in developing the concept that ALS is a disorder of RNA metabolism. In addition, both his clinical and laboratory research have focused on understanding the nature of cognitive changes in ALS. This has led to a series of studies, ultimately demonstrating that cognitive changes in ALS are associated with alterations in the metabolism of tau protein. This discovery represents a fundamental shift in the understanding of the biology of ALS.

“The Canadian Academy of Health Sciences provides a wonderful venue to work alongside other Canadian health researchers to address issues of health care provision to an aging population. By recognizing the importance of research into ALS, the Academy has signaled a critical need to further our understanding of this devastating disorder from which about three Canadians die daily” says Strong.