



Fourth call of the PhD4MD biomedical research training programme for medical doctors

- The PhD4MD Programme allows medical doctors to do a three-year research project devoted to cancer or to respiratory or neurodegenerative diseases.
- There are currently eight medical doctors conducting research in centres of excellence in Barcelona, and this year this number may increase by up to four more.

Barcelona, Wednesday 24 January 2018.- The Centre for Genomic Regulation (CRG), the August Pi i Sunyer Biomedical Research Institute (IDIBAPS), the Institute for Research in Biomedicine (IRB Barcelona), and the Vall d'Hebron Research Institute (VHIR) have launched the fourth call of the training programme "*PhD for Medical Doctors - PhD4MD*".

This initiative, the first of its kind in Spain, allows medical doctors to receive cutting-edge training in research. The ultimate aim is to strengthen links between centres devoted to basic research and hospital research centres, in order to speed up patient access to discoveries made in the lab.

This year the call is offering four three-year fellowships to undertake a PhD project between two centres participating in the programme.

Fourth group of research physicians

Eight medical doctors are currently participating in the *PhD4MD* Programme, which was launched in 2015. The first two people awarded fellowships, **Juan Miguel Cejalvo** (IRB Barcelona/IDIBAPS) and **Alberto Indacochea** (CRG, VHIR), will be defending their PhDs this year.

Juan Miguel Cejalvo explains that the period straddled between IRB Barcelona and IDIBAPS at the *Hospital Clínic de Barcelona* has allowed him to "**above all, develop critical thinking, pose hypotheses and acquire the skills to produce results**". He goes on to say, "**as an oncologist, research training is crucial to be able to develop a quality drug that allows patients to benefit from breakthroughs in a rapid and efficient way**".

As a result of his project on breast cancer metastasis, in 2017 **Juan Miguel Cejalvo** published an article in *Cancer Research*, reporting that more aggressive the breast cancer, the longer it takes to metastasise. These results may have practical implications in the way that metastatic breast cancer tumours are analysed and may contribute to improving predictions regarding survival and in the selection of treatments for patients.

Alberto Indacochea did his research at CRG and VHIR, where he studied the role of RNA binding proteins (RBPs) as potential biomarkers for cancer. His work focused on two proteins, UNR and CIRP, the alterations of which are involved in cancer progression.

"In a study published in *PLOS ONE* and done in collaboration with researchers in Madrid, we showed that the UNR protein is a potential biomarker for resectable pancreatic adenocarcinoma and that it could be useful for subsequent evaluation of adjuvant treatments," explains Indacochea.



He is currently working on identifying RBP targets in cell lines, as well as on exploring their potential role as biomarkers in a set of human tumours of other types of cancer and clinical conditions.

Seven new research projects being done close to patients

This year's candidates can choose from seven collaborative projects, which are done jointly, on the one hand at CRG, CNAG-CRG, or IRB Barcelona—research centres devoted to the life sciences—and on the other at IDIBAPS or VHIR—translational research centres associated with the *Hospital Clínic* and *Hospital Universitari Vall d'Hebron*, respectively.

The topics of the interdisciplinary projects available in the call include the effect of fat-rich diets on oral cancer metastasis, epigenetic patterns in the immune system response to kidney transplants, senescence in a certain kind of lung fibrosis, and the use of “omic” tools for identifying the genetic cause of rare and ultra-rare neurological diseases.

The application period is open till 12 March. The call is also open to medical doctors who hold degrees awarded in other countries belonging to the European Union and who have recognised equal training corresponding to a medical residency.

More information at: www.phd4md.eu

Centre de Regulació Genòmica (CRG): www.crg.eu

Institut de Recerca Biomèdica (IRB Barcelona): www.irbbarcelona.org

Vall d'Hebron Institut de Recerca (VHIR): www.vhir.org

Institut d'Investigacions Biomèdiques August Pi i Sunyer (IDIBAPS): <http://www.idibaps.org>

Centre Nacional d'Anàlisi Genòmica (CNAG-CRG): <http://www.cnag.crg.eu>

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