MEDIA RELEASE

The Oticon Foundation New Zealand
Wednesday 25 November 2009

SIGNIFICANT GRANT ALLOWS UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY TO INVESTIGATE PREVENTION OF HEARING LOSS

The Oticon Foundation in New Zealand has today awarded a research grant of almost $350,000 to the University of Canterbury to investigate the prevention of hearing loss during ear surgery.

“This is a major financial commitment to a substantial research project by the University of Canterbury’s Department of Communication Disorders into methods to monitor hearing and reduce hearing loss during otologic surgery – or ear micro-surgery,” says Tim Olphert, Chairman to the Trustees, of The Oticon Foundation in New Zealand.

“The Oticon Foundation has reviewed the proposed research headed by Dr Greg O’Beirne (PhD) and Mr Phil Bird (MBChB, FRACS) and believes it is of such significant importance internationally that it is providing the $340,895.53 needed to fund the three year project.”

The grant is being awarded at a function in Christchurch this evening [Wednesday 25 November].

This research is likely to benefit the large number of people undergoing otologic surgery, around 60 per year in Christchurch alone, with thousands more worldwide.

The funding will help establish a world leading centre for intra-operative audiological research in Christchurch, and will facilitate a range of future projects in this area.

“This research is all about better outcomes for patients,” says Mr Phil Bird, who is also an ear specialist in Christchurch and senior lecturer at the University of Otago. “Occasionally patients have problems with hearing and balance after surgery. This research will allow us to look at these issues and the interventions in a systematic way to get better results for patients.”

“The project aims to reduce the likelihood of hearing loss occurring during otologic surgery by improving current methods of intraoperative neurophysiological monitoring of auditory function and investigating the effectiveness of pharmacological interventions aimed at preventing inner ear damage,” says Dr Greg O’Beirne.

Intra-operative monitoring provides the surgeon with information about the status of the inner ear and cochlear nerve while surgery is happening. This provides a means of reducing or eliminating permanent damage to the cochlea or cochlear nerve during surgery by detecting changes in function early enough to allow the surgical team to modify their procedure.

The first stage will start shortly with the development of the monitoring system to be used during surgery. The new system will enable continuous objective measurement of both middle- and inner-ear function, and will use new stimuli and measurement techniques that help improve the quality (signal-to-noise ratio) of the intraoperative recordings.

“We are very thankful to the Oticon Foundation for supporting this major piece of work,” says Dr O’Beirne. “We will provide regular updates on progress. Results from the study will be published in international peer-reviewed journals, and presented at national and international conferences.”

The Oticon Foundation in New Zealand was established in October 1976. It is a charitable trust of Oticon New Zealand Limited and aims to improve the lives of the hearing impaired in New Zealand through communication and knowledge. It is committed to finding better solutions to hearing loss and strives to increase public awareness and understanding of hearing impairment.

Ends

For more information please contact Karen Pullar, Secretary to the Oticon Foundation in New Zealand, Phone 021 647 330 or Dr Greg O'Beirne, Department of Communication Disorders, University of Canterbury, Phone: 03 364 2431Email: gregory.obeirne@canterbury.ac.nz.