

Liver function research nets myriad of awards for young scientist

At the age of only 37, Rene Jacobs is having a significant impact on the world of dietary nutrition. His work over the past 10 years is showing fascinating results in preventing and reversing the effects of non-alcoholic liver disease, and the industry is taking notice.

Topping off an astounding list of recognitions that dates back to 2003, in the last two years, Jacobs has been awarded the Stewart Whitman New Investigator Award, the Deuel Young Investigator Award, the Canadian Institutes of Health Research New Investigator Salary Award, and in 2012 alone, the International Life Science Institute North American Future leader Award and the prestigious American Society for Nutrition E.L.R. Stokstad Award, and has also earned nearly three quarters of a million dollars in grants from various institutions and donors.

"I have a bunch of areas of study," he said, "but one of the fields in which I have enjoyed significant success this year is looking at liver disease."

"We've had some very exciting results that show how natural dietary nutrients like creatine can improve liver function, which can have significant impact in preventing the onset of early liver disease, and also how others, such as choline, can influence later stage, more serious liver diseases. They're both in a theme of dietary supplementation, but looking at it from much different angles."

After receiving his B.Sc. and Ph.D. in biochemistry from the Memorial University of Newfoundland, Jacobs joined the University of Alberta as a Postdoctoral Fellow with the Group on Cell Biology of Lipids. Since 2009 he has been working as an assistant professor with the department. His work in dietary studies has gained attention from academic institutions across the continent.

When asked what the impact of his research will be on global health in the future, Jacobs admits that the nature of his work is unpredictable, but remains determined to pursue studies that he feels will lead to the development of better health care techniques, as well as inspiring the next generation of health researchers.

"Impact moves slower than research most of the time," he said, "which is unfortunate, but it helps other people develop their own research, and sooner or later, the results are

definitely going to be felt. We don't know what the impact of our research will be in 10 or 20 years, so we have to keep working at it and discovering new things."

"Whether the awards have had an impact on me," he laughs, "I guess we'll see when I apply for more grants."



L to R: Karen Kelly, Rene Jacobs, Robin da Silva