

Paul Biog. ZHANG, Wei

NEWS

# Researcher's work gets kudos

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A Mississauga researcher has received a coveted award for his pioneering work in the relatively new field of protein engineering to combat infectious viral outbreaks.

Wei Zhang, 34, a postdoctoral fellow at University of Toronto's (U of T) Donnelly Centre for Cellular and Biomolecular Research, was presented with the Mitacs Award for Outstanding Innovation (postdoctoral) by Mitacs, a national nonprofit.

Wei received the accolade for successfully developing a patent-pending platform capable of fighting Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Crimean-Congo Hemorrhagic Fever (Congo Fever) at a molecular level.

"Every year we are seeing more and more virus attacks that seem to come out of nowhere," said Zhang. "A lot of work has been concentrated on developing vaccines, but they only protect people who are healthy. What's lacking is a clinical drug capable of treating the virus itself and that's where my research is proving effective."

Zhang was one of six Mitacs award winners nationally.

The Mississauga man's work is significant because it has the potential to be

applied to other viruses such as SARS, Zika and Ebola as well as preventing critical infestation in crops and animals, said Alejandro Adem, Mitacs' CEO and scientific director.

Working under the supervision of U of T professors Sachdev Sidhu and Jason Moffat, Zhang has demonstrated it's possible to create - or engineer - an entirely new molecule capable of interfering with disease-causing microorganisms.

Toronto-startup Ubiquitech is now working to commercialize Zhang's work so it can be used in a clinical setting. The next step is to develop a delivery mechanism for the new molecular therapy and clinical trials are expected to start once the approach is finalized.

"Each of our award recipients, as well as the thousands of additional Mitacs researchers in our network, exemplifies the strong leadership and collaborative qualities that are essential to delivering leading-edge research in Canada," said Adem in a press release that congratulated the winners.

"Their ongoing contributions are nothing short of remarkable. Every year they continue to astound us with their groundbreaking advancements that help put Canada on the map as a recognized leader in research and innovation."

For more information visit [www.mitacs.ca](http://www.mitacs.ca).