



**By donalee Moulton**

*on behalf of the Science Media Centre of Canada  
Steering Committee*

# Where Science and Journalism Meet

## *A Science Media Centre for Canada*

My morning routine—a quick scan of the newspaper, a sip from a steaming cup of coffee, a 20-minute drive to work, and a raft of e-mail to answer—reminds me, daily, of the importance of science. While my coffee mug isn't stamped 'particle physics' and my e-mail is not in binary code, science is at the heart of how we live, how we improve that living, and how we envision that living could be.

Quite simply, science is everywhere.

Canadians have a voracious appetite for scientific information—and they prefer to receive that information from the media. According to research conducted by Angus Reid Strategies in 2007, nearly nine out of 10 Canadians said they have changed their behaviour as a direct result of media reports on health and health research. The survey also indicated that Canadians are eager for more coverage of science and that they want more scientific background in media stories.

That's a tall order in a media landscape where there are fewer and fewer science journalists. Today, journalists are increasingly pressured to be generalists, covering a political scandal on Monday, a fatal car crash on Tuesday, a theatre review on Wednesday, and a listeria outbreak on Thursday. This reality means journalists require quick and

easy access to accurate, timely and relevant scientific information.

At least three jurisdictions—the U.K., Australia and New Zealand—are helping to address these needs through the establishment of a science media centre, and Canada is about to join them.

Just over a year ago, a group made up of scientists and media came together to explore the possibility of establishing the Science Media Centre of Canada, believing that better coverage of science in the media would benefit scientists, journalists, policy-makers and the public. This has certainly been experienced in other countries.

With the generous support of the Canada Foundation for Innovation, Halifax Global Inc. conducted a feasibility study to determine the philosophical, financial and practical support for creating the Science Media Centre of Canada. After analyzing the results from a survey, focus groups, interviews with key players, and an environmental scan, they concluded that there is strong interest from both journalists and scientists (as well as editors, public relations professionals, academics, government, and the private sector) in establishing such a centre.

What exactly will a science media centre do? It will provide journalists with timely

and efficient access to qualified researchers and accurate information to support the reporting of factual and evidence-based science stories through a wide array of tools and services available online, in person and by phone. These will include media briefings, a rapid-response system, fact sheets and training (for both journalists in such areas as statistics, and scientists in such areas as media relations).

At the heart of the centre beats a comprehensive, Canada-wide database of scientists and researchers, experts in their fields and experts at translating the formality of science into easily understandable language.

It's a tall order. Achieving the vision, and the full potential of the Science Media Centre of Canada (SMCC), will take time. But the results will be well worth the effort. For journalists, for scientists, for all Canadians.