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Shining a light on research & innovation.

Making Discovery 'A Question of Brains, Not Money'

An interview with **Connie Jean Eaves**, Biologist, University of British Columbia
2019 Canada Gairdner Wightman Award Laureate

People think that discovery is light bulbs going off. Occasionally that happens. You're looking for something and you see something you never saw before. But it's much more frequent that you're working on something, and it doesn't work out the way you thought, and you make a chance observation that doesn't fit, and you go back and try to understand it. And then you realize a whole new direction.

The trajectory from gaining new understanding to making use of it varies all over the place. Sometimes it turns out that the very discovery itself can have a clinical translation, and we have had that experience and that's very exciting.

What impact has your research made?

We were creating tests for cells. We wanted the tests to be valid so they would always measure the same cells at the same sensitivity and the same accuracy, so that when you applied that test to another scenario, it would feed back information that would have meaning and would be useful. We were a little group way off in the boonies, and how are we going to compete with the big centres all over the world? We knew how to detect cells and we knew that that relied on very special ingredients, just like making a cake. So you've got the best saffron in the world and you know where it comes from, you get it, and we decided that instead of just having the big centres able to do things with lots of money, we would make the best materials available to everybody. So we would lower the playing field, and it was going to be a question of brains, not money.

TODAY'S RESEARCH. TOMORROW'S REALITY.