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Bloomberg Nursing professor's Ontario Early Researcher Award supports education of emerging sleep scientists

The Ontario Ministry of Research and Innovation has presented Bloomberg Nursing professor Robyn Stremler with an Early Researcher Award (ERA), which will help fund the education of the next generation of sleep scientists in the province – a field in which nurses are especially underrepresented.

Stremler, a CIHR New Investigator, is the principal investigator for the Sleep TYME (Throughout Your Motherhood Experience) Study, which will provide a better understanding of the prevalence of, and risk factors for, sleep disturbance in pregnancy. Little research has examined women's experiences of sleep loss and disturbance during this period, but there is evidence that poor sleep in pregnancy and after birth increases the risk of adverse perinatal outcomes, such as preeclampsia, caesarean section and depression. The information gathered during the study will aid in the design of prevention and screening strategies, and guide the development of interventions to improve the health of mothers and infants.

"It's exciting to be able to contribute to the preparation of new sleep researchers," says Stremler. "Knowing that our work together will improve our understanding of the relationships between women's sleep and problems in pregnancy, and lead to ways to improve health for mothers and their babies is very encouraging."

The highly competitive ERA program is designed to support Ontario's most promising young researchers build teams to produce world-leading research innovations. By providing funds to include undergraduate and PhD students on research teams, the Ministry of Research and Innovation also hopes to improve Ontario's ability to attract and retain the province's best and brightest research talent.

Over the five years encompassed by the award, a number of undergraduate and doctoral students will be provided with the opportunity to collect and analyse sleep data using actigraphy, a non-invasive device that monitors movement and objectively measures sleep. As one of only a select group of scientists using actigraphy in Canada, Stremler's expertise is often sought by other researchers. In addition, the students will gain an in-depth understanding of research study design and conduct from one of North America's few nurse trialists, and participate in filling a recognized need for highly qualified sleep researchers. As acknowledgement of the importance of sleep to overall health and workers' productivity grows, the research experience acquired with Stremler will be essential to producing sleep scientists who can improve the sleep and health of society.

Through methodological expertise in randomized controlled trials, Stremler's research program aims to improve sleep for families and examine the effects of nursing interventions on their health. Consistent with her clinical experience in maternal child health and paediatric sleep, Stremler's specific areas of research include: sleep for pregnant women and families with a newborn; sleep for families with an acutely or chronically ill child; and interventions to improve perinatal outcomes for women and infants. Stremler already developed a behavioural-educational intervention to improve maternal and infant sleep in early postpartum, which led to the design of a large, multi-centre, randomized controlled trial.

For more information about the ERA program, visit the Ontario Ministry of Research and Innovation website.

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