



—SP Photo by Laura Keil

Janine Katelnikoff and her grandchildren stand with Dr. Jose Tellez-Zenteno with a portrait of Ruth MacIver

Donation of brain, cash aims to aid epilepsy fight

**By Laura Keil
of The StarPhoenix**

In 1933, 11-year-old Ruth MacIver suffered an epileptic seizure and was taken out of school. MacIver's condition was a source of frustration for her father, a medical doctor, who could do little to help her.

So began the life of the woman whose donation of her brain and \$89,000 to the University of Saskatchewan College of Medicine will allow scientists to use the biomedical beamline at the Canadian Light Source Synchrotron to study epilepsy for the first time.

The research will help improve diagnosing and understanding individual cases of the neurological disorder. MacIver's medical history will accompany research on her brain, data not usually available to researchers.

Dr. Jose Tellez-Zenteno, who will conduct most of the research, says MacIver's gifts will help expand the budding epilepsy program at Royal University Hospital, a partnership between specialists in different medical fields.

"We are using new medications and new devices in studying epilepsy, so these donations come at a good time in the programme, because we can use them for clinical research."

MacIver died in March at the age of 86 after a life-long struggle with generalized epilepsy, a condition that made her ineligible for surgery. It was not until she was in her 50s that a combination of drugs was worked out to control her seizures.

She never married, fearing that she might pass down her condition to her children.

MacIver's cousin, Janine Katelnikoff, and Katelnikoff's four grandchildren met with Tellez-Zenteno Friday afternoon to deliver the cheque.

"In passing, her last wishes were that she left 90 per cent of her estate to the university for Dr. Tellez and

the research he does in epilepsy, hoping that one day there will be a cure," Katelnikoff said, standing next to a large painted portrait of her cousin.

Tellez-Zenteno says part of the money may go towards a portable Electroencephalogram (EEG) for adults. Epilepsy is often difficult to diagnose, as the brain changes do not occur at predictable times, often requiring the patient to remain in hospital for several days. The portable EEG allows those suffering from epilepsy symptoms to wear the implanted device for 24 to 48 hours at home, allowing time for doctors to collect data on their symptoms, and make more accurate diagnoses. So far, the devices are only used regularly in children.

"I'm very happy about this donation," Tellez-Zenteno said. "We have a lot of potential, because we are the only place in the province that does (this research)."

The decision about the money is still under review by the ethics committee. If approved, doctors would follow some 90 epilepsy patients with the implanted devices over the course of three years, allowing long-term research on their brains.

For MacIver, along with the 300,000 other Canadians who currently suffer from epilepsy, the research is crucial to improving the lives of those diagnosed with the disorder. Epilepsy is the second most common chronic neurological disorder, after chronic headache. Some 42 Canadians are diagnosed with epilepsy each day, and around 10,000 live in Saskatchewan.

In a short autobiography, MacIver writes that before the drugs, she lived in constant fear of making a fool of herself in public.

After she quit school, she persevered in her learning. She read many books and Katelnikoff said entering her home was "like walking into a library."

She worked for 27 years at The StarPhoenix as a proofreader.

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