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# A \$15-million gift for R.I. Hospital

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PROVIDENCE — Days before last Christmas, Guillaume de Ramel, a descendant of the financier Frederick Henry Prince, went to talk philanthropy with Timothy J. Babineau, president and CEO of Rhode Island Hospital and The Miriam Hospital.

Because of the Prince family's interests in aviation — one of its members lost his life as a volunteer pilot for France during World War I — de Ramel quipped that he thought the gift might support a “flying ambulance.”

“But then Dr. Babineau steered me to the potential of brain science,” de Ramel recalled Tuesday.

The result is a \$15-million gift from the Frederick Henry Prince 1932 Trust — the largest single philanthropic gift in hospital history — to develop a neurosciences institute aimed at making the hospital a national leader in research and treatment of brain-related diseases.

About 200 hospital employees of all ranks watched the announcement Tuesday in the two-story lobby of the Hasbro Children's Hospital, the pediatric division of Rhode Island Hospital. A few gasped when Babineau disclosed the amount of the gift. Sustained applause filled the hall.

At Babineau's side sat de Ramel, his brother Regis de Ramel, and their mother, Elizabeth J. M. Prince, all of Newport. (Guillaume de Ramel ran unsuccessfully as a Democratic candidate for Rhode Island secretary of state in 2006.)

“This is a family that gets it in a very big way. They instantly grasped what we were trying to do at Rhode Island Hospital in terms of this transformative gift,” Babineau said.

He said the same kind of collaboration that has brought advances in the treatment of heart disease and cancer during the last 30 years will mark breakthroughs in the battle against brain-related diseases during the next several decades.

Dr. G. Rees Cosgrove, chief of neurosurgery at Rhode Island Hospital and The Miriam Hospital, and chair of neurosurgery at the Brown medical school, said that brain science is “the last frontier of academic medicine.”

“This gift will enable Rhode Island Hospital to become one of the nation's leaders in neurosciences,” he said.

Babineau, meanwhile, said that the new Norman Prince Neurosciences Institute will bring together neuroscience, neurology and psychiatry to “unlock the mysteries of the many different diseases that affect the brain.”

The new institute will bear the name of Norman Prince, the World War I aviator who flew for France before the United States entered the conflict. His plane crashed in October 1916, leaving him with fatal injuries, including head trauma.

The institute will work with the Warren Alpert Medical School at Brown University and Brown’s Institute for Brain Science, where researcher John P. Donoghue has earned international recognition for a device that translates signals from the brains of paralyzed patients into impulses that allow them to work a computer or a robotic device.

Babineau also said after the announcement that he has had conversations about the new institute with Dr. Steven Rasmussen, medical director of Butler Hospital and the interim chair of the department of psychiatry and human behavior at the Brown medical school.

Rasmussen is known for his work in treating patients suffering from severe obsessive compulsive disorder with neurosurgical approaches that include gamma knife surgery and deep brain stimulation, a procedure in which an electrode is implanted in the brain.

“There’s a lot of expertise on this campus and others,” Babineau said, but right now researchers are working in “silos.”

“Our intent is to be inclusive,” he said.

The work of the neurosciences institute will begin with a national search for a director, expected to take six months, and the selection of a steering council that will articulate the scientific and medical mission of the institute in a year’s time.

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