

Teen looks forward to a cure

Blindness research gets \$2.4M boost

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Fifteen-year-old Molly Burke tries to live as normal a life as possible.

She sings, she acts, she goes to school, but there's one difference.

Her eyesight is failing her to the point that she uses a guide dog, learns Braille and uses a specialized computer that reads to her.

The Oakville girl was diagnosed with retinitis pigmentosa when she was five.

Yesterday, Molly was given "a ray of hope" that may one day restore her sight.

The Canadian Institute of Health Research and the Foundation Fighting Blindness (FFB) agreed to give \$2.4 million for a five-year stem cell research project to reverse blindness.

"One of the biggest challenges with something like vision loss, unlike cancer or heart disease, is that its difficult to find people to fund research, so whatever something like this happens it's terrific news," Molly's dad, Peter, 48, said.

"As a parent, it's a ray of hope that Molly's vision will be restored. On the day Molly was diagnosed, doctors were convinced that within her lifetime they'd find a cure and this is a big step in that direction," Peter said.

"It gives hope to patients that therapies are coming which will be able to treat blindness in the future," Sharon Colle, FFB president said.

Stem cell research could benefit one million Canadians affected by degenerative eye diseases that cause blindness. By replacing cells that have been lost through disease or injury, the therapies could potentially benefit anyone at any stage of eye disease.

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Molly Burke, 15, with guide dog Gypsy, is hopeful that a \$2.4-million stem cell research project will find a cure for her retinitis pigmentosa.