

**Groundbreaking for the Djavad Mowafaghian Centre for Brain Health
Tuesday, October 11, 2011 — UBC Hospital Parking Lot
Professor Stephen J. Toope, President and Vice-Chancellor
The University of British Columbia**

Ladies and gentlemen, honoured guests, and friends of UBC, it is my sincere pleasure to welcome you to the University of British Columbia today and to celebrate this event with you.

I have a story I want to share with you. Some of you may know of it already. In 2006, a neuro-anatomist named Dr. Jill Bolte Taylor had a stroke. A blood clot in the left hemisphere of her brain robbed her of her ability to walk, talk, read, and write. She could no longer think in a linear fashion, recall any of her past, or conceive of a future. For her, suddenly, there was only the present moment, only a collage of sights and sounds and tastes and physical sensations forming a kaleidoscope of 'now.' For the next several years, there was only the world as the right hemisphere of her brain experienced it: expanded, interconnected, and so wondrous as to be at times overwhelming. And Dr. Taylor was locked inside that world.

In the midst of massive injury, she came to appreciate this altered experience, and she remembered it. So that eight years later, fully recovered, she was able to write a book about it, present a TED Talk about it, and share it with the world. The conclusion her experience led her to was this (quote): "I am an energy being connected to the energy all around meWe are [all] energy beings connected to one another as one human family. And right here, right now, we are brothers and sisters on this planet,

here to make the world a better place.”¹ She called this her ‘stroke of insight.’

I was prompted to share this story after reading a quotation I noticed on the Djavad Mowafaghian Foundation website, from the medieval Persian poet Saadi. It opens like this:

The children of Adam are limbs of each other, having been created of one essence.

*When ... calamity ... affects one limb, the other limbs cannot remain at rest.*²

We are all connected. When one of us is weak, the rest are weakened. When one of us grows stronger, we are all strengthened. Together, we are more, and better, than we can be on our own.

In this quotation, and in that story, I see a reflection of all that we are aspiring to achieve with this Centre for Brain Health:

- collaboration between UBC’s Faculty of Medicine and Vancouver Coastal Health;
- partnership with and support from our Provincial and Federal governments, as well as the kindness, forward thinking, and generosity of friends of UBC;

¹ From Jill Bolte Taylor’s TED Talk at:
http://www.ted.com/talks/jill_bolte_taylor_s_powerful_stroke_of_insight.html

² <http://mowafaghianfoundation.com/founder/>

- an inclusive approach to brain health that unites research in neuroscience, geriatric medicine, mental health, and addiction medicine; and
- a union of research and patient care in the same physical space.

A stroke of insight is of benefit only to the extent that we can share it with the world. The ability to do so comes from working *together*: Right brain, left brain. Private-public partnership. Interdisciplinary research. And researchers, caregivers, and patients working together toward health, and hope.

On behalf of UBC, it is my honour and pleasure to acknowledge **Mr. Rudy North** for his critical contribution, his foresight, and his careful attention to brain research at UBC over time; **the Townsend family** for their tremendous generosity, and their longstanding friendship with and support of UBC; and **Dr. Djavad Mowafaghian**—for his own stroke of insight and for his extraordinary gift to this project and to health, and to hope. You [*all*] make it easy to believe that right here, right now, we can make the world a better place. Thank you.

I now invite my colleague Dr. David Ostrow, President and CEO of Vancouver Coastal Health, to the podium. David ...