

Sir Gustav Nossal, AC CBE – ASMR Medallist 2008

FOUR DECADES OF PROGRESS IN AUSTRALIAN MEDICAL RESEARCH

In an address to the National Press Club today, Sir Gustav Nossal, Australia's elder statesman of health and medical research, examined reasons why Australia, contributing just 1.5% of global health expenditure, performs 3% of world medical research and why it is important for Australia to continue conducting medical research.

Identifying common features of Australian iconic discoveries such as the Bionic ear, *Helicobacter pylori* and cervical cancer vaccine, Sir Gustav said, "These wonderful examples of Australian research all involved dreams conceived early and pursued for decades with intense dedication. All rest on an extensive base of fundamental science. All asked bold, direct questions of real importance and forged a forceful linear research strategy, all used multi-disciplinary collaboration and all required industry involvement for completion."

Australian discoveries have a major global impact and Professor Nossal believes Australia has a responsibility to contribute to the world effort. Sir Gustav said, "The participation of our researchers in worldwide scientific exchange ensures the analysis and prioritization of overseas discoveries and speeds the introduction of the most valuable ones. In a health system costing over \$100 billion annually, this function is priceless".

"The sector", Sir Gustav said, "is a major employer and recent growth has been healthy at 12% per annum, ranking us in the middle of the OECD range. We must keep up the momentum and investment should reach the top OECD quartile per capita".

"Much progress has been made in the last four decades and the basic science, bold dreams, dedication and collaborative skills demonstrated by Australian researchers will serve us well into the future".

"Indigenous health needs extra attention. Substance abuse, sexual abuse, homicide and other violence are higher, requiring sociological and health service research. Some infections are much higher, eg scabies and streptococcal infections leading to kidney and heart disease. Thankfully, for Group A streptococci (GAS), a vaccine is ready for clinical trials."

Professor Nossal says third world diseases are under researched. "Large pharma companies do not find diseases of poverty attractive. Infections still abound in parasitic and diarrhoeal diseases and respiratory infections with vaccines offering the best hope". Australia discovered the greatest cause of diarrhoea, the rotavirus. Extra support is needed to take this vaccine to clinical trials. GMO staple crops could play a role in overcoming poor nutrition.

"Australian health and medical research", Sir Gustav said, "is a good news story. It is a fine collaboration between researchers, governments, health administrators, industry, philanthropy and civil society. It is perhaps the prime example of the clever country."

President of The Australian Society for Medical Research, Dr Mark Hulett, congratulated Professor Nossal on being awarded the ASMR Medal for 2008. Dr Hulett said it was particularly apt that Professor Nossal's

talk immediately precedes the launch of the Society's new Access Economics Report, "Exceptional Returns – The Value of Investing in Health R&D in Australia II"

The new report confirms the value of the investment as exceptional with returns compared by sector, second only to retail and mining.

News Editors/Chiefs of Staff, please note:

WHAT: National Press Club NAB Address

WHEN: 11.45am, Wednesday 4 June 2008

WHERE: 16 National Court, Barton, Canberra.

WHO: ASMR Medallist Sir Gustav Nossal, AC CBE, Emeritus Professor, Department of Pathology, University of Melbourne

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