

March 2007

in this issue

President's Report

Health and Medical research (HMR) in Australia kicks off to a great start this year with the much needed and welcomed increase in Federal funding to the NHMRC being phased in over the next 4 years. One only needs to look at the funding situation for American medical researchers and institutions to be reminded of the devastating effect three years of flat funding can have on health and medical research. "Flat funding in recent years combined with the force of biomedical research inflation has eroded the National Institutes of Health's (NIH) ability to maintain the momentum of discovery that has resulted in dramatic declines in death from heart disease and cancer." said Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology, President, Leo T. Furcht, M.D. We applaud the Australian Federal Government's decision to support HMR and avoid a period of flat funding, however it is unlikely that this trend will continue indefinitely.

Current funding models for HMR are cyclical and unpredictable and key investments in research and researchers can lead to economic and knowledge-based loss if funding is not sustained. Australia has seen strong economic growth over recent years and Federal Government support for HMR is currently high. HMR needs to be buffered against decreases in funding in order for Australian research to continue to achieve at a high international standard and deliver clear health and economic outcomes for this country. Our Society is at the vanguard of planning for sustainable funding for health and medical research (HMR). ASMR has organised a specialist forum to explore diverse sources of funding for HMR from government and non-government sources with the aim of providing a blueprint for the future security of HMR funding in Australia. The forum is entitled "The Future of Medical Research: Sustainable Funding Model" and we will be driving this ASMR initiative forward with key stakeholders in HMR.

As any successful medical researcher will tell you — the success of a lab depends on the ability to attract and retain a solid base of well-trained, contented researchers. There is much anecdotal evidence regarding brain drain, job satisfaction and funding stress on researchers. ASMR has just completed a Workforce Survey in association with the University of Queensland Social Research Centre, which will be officially launched before ASMR Medical Research Week® this year. The quantitative



Associate Professor Maria Kavallaris, ASMR President

data obtained from the survey revealed a disquieting picture with a significant degree of dissatisfaction among the Australian HMR workforce. A number of key issues facing HMR scientists emerged, with two prominent problems being lack of financial support and employment insecurity.

ASMR Medical Research Week® and the ASMR Medallist Tour are flag ship events for our society. I am extremely pleased that Professor Axel Ullrich, Director of Molecular Biology at the Max Planck Institute, will be the ASMR Medallist for 2007. His pioneering research demonstrates how basic research can be translated to the clinic. He developed the first multi-targeted kinase inhibitor for cancer therapy and was a key player in the development of the breast cancer treatment Herceptin, listed on the PBS in October 2006. A profile of Professor Ullrich's achievements and awards is contained in this issue. ASMR Medical Research Week® 2007 will feature a broad range of national and state based activities, including scientific meetings, career development programs, schools programs, public outreach events and dinners. Additional information on ASMR MRW® events and Medallist Tour can be found in this Newsletter.

In keeping with themed meetings in the intervening years between the AHMRC, the 2007 ASMR National Scientific Conference (NSC) is on "Tissue Remodelling: Current Understanding and Future Therapeutic Targets". The meeting will be held in the Blue Mountains, NSW, from November 11–13, 2007. The ASMR NSC Convenors, Drs Alaina Ammit and Alastair Stewart are assembling an exciting program, which will be of interest to diverse disciplines.

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Print Post Approved

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A key event in the HMR calendar is the biennial Australian Health and Medical Research Congress (AHMRC). The 3rd AHMRC held in Melbourne in November 2006 was a fantastic success setting new benchmarks for this type of event. A full report of the congress is provided in this issue. I would like to thank the 3rd AHMRC Convenor, Dr Sandra Nicholson, for an outstanding job in organising the meeting and facilitating participating societies and special interest groups. Dr Hamish Scott, AHMRC Scientific Program Convenor, did a superb job in co-ordinating the outstanding scientific program. The success of the congress depends on the participating societies and groups. We congratulate all for their involvement and input. Once again, the professional support of ASN Events, Mike Pickford, Maree Overall and their teams, ensured the smooth running of the week.

The 4th AHMRC will be held for the first time in Brisbane on the 14–21 November, 2008. Congratulations to Dr Alison Butt (ASMR Director) who has taken on the role

of AHMRC Convenor and A/Prof Greg Anderson who is the AHMRC Scientific Program Convenor. A/Prof Alejandro Lopez (ASMR Director) will convene the ASMR National Scientific Meeting at the AHMRC in 2008. Stay tuned for further information.

In keeping with our commitment to help foster and support HMR careers, we will be conducting ASMR Professional Development Workshops in the second half of 2007. Members will receive full details in the near future.

Promoting and effectively communicating HMR discoveries and outcomes is an essential part of medical research. To continue to receive public, private and donated funds for research we need to involve our stakeholders, the general public, in our journey of discovery. As a new ASMR initiative, we invite you to forward your media releases and share your discoveries and successes to the ASMR Executive Office to be included in a new link on our web site titled "Medical Research Discoveries".

It was great to see Nobel Laureates Professors Barry Marshall and John Warren, receiving honours in the Australia Day Awards. Many scientists were recognised, for their achievements and contributions, including Dame Bridget Margaret Ogilvie (a former ASMR Medallist), A/Prof Constantine Aroney, Prof Richard Henry, Prof Michelle Haber, A/Prof David Gillett to name a few. Congratulations also go to 2006 Australian of the Year, Professor Ian Frazer on receiving the prestigious 2006 Merck Sharp & Dohme Florey Medal from the Australian Institute for Policy and Science.

It is crucial to remember the importance of advocacy on behalf of HMR. Wherever possible, inform politicians, donors and the general public about your research and achievements. The process of educating the community on the health and economic value of HMR will ensure we build a solid advocacy base for the sustainable future funding of medical research in Australia. asmr



ASMR Directors 2007

From left: Gilda Tachedjian, Mark Hulett (President Elect), Cath West (Senior Exec. Officer), Sarah Meachem, Alaina Ammit, Martin Delatycki, Maria Kavallaris (ASMR President), Peter Eastwood, Alison Butt, Alejandro Lopez, Sandra Nicholson, Emma Parkinson-Lawrence

**Associate Professor Maria Kavallaris,
President,
Australian Society for Medical Research**

ASMR Research Awards

The Australian Society for Medical Research invites applications for **The ASMR Research Awards**. Each award (\$5000 international or \$2000 domestic) will support a postgraduate student member of the Society nearing completion of their studies or a recently graduated postdoctoral member to undertake a short period of research in a laboratory outside of their home city. The award specifically excludes support for conference attendance and travel for an extended period of postdoctoral studies.

Applicants for "The ASMR Research Awards" must have been members of the ASMR for at least 12 months immediately preceding the year in which the Award application is to be considered. Applicants must have no more than 3 years active research post their highest degree (career interruptions will be considered). The Award must be taken up during the first 6 months of the following year. Applications close 5.00pm, Friday 27th September, 2007. Application forms for the Awards may be found at <http://www.asmr.org.au/resfund/intro.html> asmr

NHMRC — 2007 Update

Peer review is the heart and soul of NHMRC's competitive (highly competitive!) grant schemes, and I am committed to ensuring the best and fairest processes possible. The time, care and quality that many thousands of health and medical researchers bring to NHMRC and other funding bodies' peer review processes each year is truly humbling.

NHMRC's peer review processes will include the following changes in 2007, designed to strengthen review and ensure fairness:

- Program Grant applications will go to external review in 2007;
- Project Grant applications will be reviewed by two Grant Review Panel (GRP) members, and one external assessor to review scientific content only;
- Reviews will be sent to applicants prior to the GRP for responses/rebuttals; and
- Selection of GRP members will be made on the recommendation of NHMRC "selectors" in 2007. These are leading national researchers who themselves will not be either Chairs or Deputy Chair of GRP.

Further consideration is being given to the make up of our GRPs for the 2008 round, to ensure that they reflect the way research is constructed and performed in the 21st century. NHMRC will issue a proposal for discussion later in 2007.


Discussion on peer review is widespread internationally and is always in the news, with some stimulating articles in recent editions of *Nature*, *Science*, *Cell* and other leading journals focussing on US activities.



Professor Warwick Anderson, NHMRC CEO

Career Development Awards — New Developments

Last year, a review of NHMRC's Career Development Awards (CDA) revealed that the vast majority of awards were made to applicants in the last couple of years of eligibility: that is, 8–9 years postdoctoral. To ensure a better "fit" between NHMRC awards and the needs to develop researchers for Australia's future, we have split the CDA scheme into two levels, CDA1 (for 2–6 years postdoctoral), and CDA2 (for 7–12 years postdoctoral), with allowance made for career interruptions should these have occurred. The duration for both will be 4 years. The previous Industry Fellowships and the Howard Florey Centenary Fellowship will be incorporated within this expanded system.

The postdoctoral years are crucial in the development of researchers and there can be wide differences in the career paths now between biomedical, clinical, public health and health services research approaches. Flexibility of schemes is therefore required, so that we can identify and support the most outstanding researchers for the benefit of Australia's health. 

The ASMR Member Directory

The ASMR Member Directory is a new initiative to promote communication and collaboration between health and medical researchers in Australia.

The Directory is a web-based search engine that will include individuals' position(s) and professional contact details, degrees, membership of other societies, website and four keywords/phrases (research interests).

You will be able to update your information via password access to the Directory. It is to be openly

available to the public, be searchable by surname and by research interest.

ASMR members have received a consent form for listing in the Directory. It is important that you complete and sign it, and return it to the Executive Office as soon as possible. The form can also be downloaded from <http://www.asmr.org.au/about/membership.html>.

Don't miss this opportunity to be included in this important networking resource. We look forward to receiving your forms. 

ASMR Medical Research Week® 2007

ASMR Medical Research Week® is our major public outreach event of the year, promoting community understanding and support for health and medical research across Australia. Planning for ASMR Medical Research Week® 2007 (1–8 June) is well underway, with state scientific meetings, expos, rural schools outreach programs, careers days and professional development courses taking place nationwide. A real highlight of the week is the national lecture tour by the ASMR Medallist, Professor Axel Ullrich. Axel will be speaking at ASMR Medical Research Week® Dinners, in Tasmania (31st May), Brisbane (1st June), Sydney (5th June), Adelaide (4th June), Melbourne (7th June) and Perth (8th June), and will deliver the televised NAB address at the National Press Club in Canberra (6th June) when he will be presented with the ASMR Medal 2007.

The 2006 Australian Health & Medical Research Congress — A Great Success

Dr Sandra Nicholson
Conference Convenor

The 3rd AHMRC held in Melbourne last November was heralded as a great success with an overwhelming positive response from the attendees. With 2314 registrations, over 150 scientific sessions, 61 invited overseas speakers and another 206 invited Australians and 1226 abstracts, the 3rd AHMRC set new records and benchmarks for a national scientific meeting.


The Congress provides a unique opportunity for Australian medical researchers to meet on mass, facilitating collaboration and the cross-fertilisation of ideas in a stimulating setting. Last year we were joined for the first time by COSA and their strong clinical presence greatly enhanced the focus of the meeting on translational research and health outcomes.

The stand-alone plenary sessions were a daily extravagance with outstanding presentations from Profs Richard Flavell, Jean-Paul Thiery, Rudi Jaenisch, Joe Nevins and John Bergeron. Jean-Paul Thiery's animated discourse on cell adhesion in development and disease remains for me a memorable highlight.

The ASMR program focused on cytokines, inflammation and disease with Prof Richard Flavell from Yale University named as the Firkin Orator and Prof Chris Goodnow from the John Curtin School of Medical Research named as the Edwards Orator. Their joint session with Prof Jonathon Sprent from the Garvan Institute was exceptional and very well attended.

There were many opportunities for researchers and health professionals to get to know one another over drinks and posters sessions and an excellent Trade display. Many of the Societies held dinners in

Melbourne's fine local restaurants, while the "Congress Carnivale" was a more casual affair complete with flame-throwers, jugglers and acrobats.

My thanks to all members of the organising committee, in particular Hamish Scott as Program Convenor and Robyn Starr as the ASMR Program Convenor. We are grateful to all our sponsors and supporters and we look forward to seeing you again in Brisbane in 2008. 



Past ASMR Presidents join for a reunion at the AHMRC 2007.

From left to right: Jock Findlay, Paul Nestel, Steve Wesselingh, Levon Khachigian, Peter O'Loughlin, Mathew Gillespie, Moira Clay, Andrew Sinclair, John McDougal, Rob Ramsay.



3rd AHMRC Convenor, Dr Sandra Nicholson and AHMRC Scientific Program Convenor, Dr Hamish Scott at the opening of the AHMRC with

The Governor of Victoria, Professor David de Kretser and Reverend Tim Costello (CEO, World Vision Australia)

The Rolex Awards for Enterprise

The Rolex Awards support exceptional men and women who are breaking new ground in areas, which advance human knowledge and wellbeing. The Rolex Awards for Enterprise support outstanding initiatives in five key areas including Science and Medicine. Five winning applicants whose projects are deemed the most outstanding each receive US\$100,000. Closing date May 31st 2007. For further information refer to the following website: www.rolexawards.com/awards/focus/index.html



ASMR President Maria Kavallaris and ASMR President Elect Mark Hulett at the AHMRC Congress



AHMRC Convenors and Society Representatives.

From left to right: Richard Simpson (APS), Hamish Scott (Program Convenor), Eliza Snow (MEPSA), Sandra Nicholson (Congress Convenor), Robyn Starr (ASMR), Rebecca Ritchie (ASCEPT) and Sanchia Aranda (COSA).

Congress Prize Winners



Dr Sandra Nicholson presents Stephanie Gauci with the CASS Foundation Best of the Best Student Poster Award

CASS Foundation Best of the Best Student Poster Award

Stephanie Gauci

The University of Melbourne & the Murdoch Childrens Research Institute
\$5,000



Dr Sandra Nicholson presents Eva Tomaskovic-Cook with the Cure Cancer Foundation Student Poster Prize

Cure Cancer Foundation Student Poster Award

Eva Tomaskovic-Cook

Ludwig Institute
\$1,000



Dr Sandra Nicholson presents Andrew Trotter with the NARF Postdoctoral Poster Prize

NARF Postdoctoral Poster Prize

Andrew Trotter

Ludwig Institute
\$1,000



Dr Sandra Nicholson presents Rishika Pace with the NARF Student Poster Prize

NARF Student Poster Prize

Rishika Pace


Murdoch Childrens Research Institute \$200

ASMR The Campion-Ma-Playoust Memorial Award

Erinna Lee

The Walter & Eliza Hall Institute \$1,000

Merck Sharp and Dohme Best of the Best Poster Award

Dr Wei-Ran Pan from the Jack Brockhoff Reconstructive Plastic Surgery Research Unit at the University of Melbourne was awarded the MSD Best of the Best Poster Award worth \$8,000 for his research entitled "The Lymphatic Drainage of the Superficial Tissue of the Head and Neck". Current knowledge of the anatomy of the lymphatic vessels in the head and neck is based on studies performed over 100 years ago. Dr Wei-Ran Pan has mapped the anatomical details of the lymphatic pathways of the head and neck of human cadavers. His study will provide an accurate anatomical lymphatic image of the superficial tissue of the head and neck, which will aid clinicians with the management of trauma and malignancies in this region of the body. 



Dr Sandra Nicholson presents Wei-Ran Pan with the Merck Sharp And Dohme Best of the Best Poster Award

AMGEN Award

Amgen Australia Pty Ltd continue their support of Australian research through the 12th AMGEN Medical Researcher Award. This award, which provides up to \$6,000 to attend an international meeting, recognizes excellence in medical research by a postdoctoral researcher working on translational studies in Australia. Application form and information flyer are available from the ASMR website at: <http://www.asmr.org.au/news/Awards/Index.html>. Applications must be postmarked or emailed no later than Friday 27th April, 2007.

ASMR Medalist — Professor Axel Ullrich

We are delighted to announce the 2007 ASMR Medical Research Week® Medallist, Professor Axel Ullrich. His pioneering research on targeted therapies and translating discoveries from the bench to bedside for the treatment of cancer and other diseases is truly inspiring. Below is a brief overview of his achievements.



Professor
Axel Ullrich

Professor Axel Ullrich was trained as a biochemist at the University of Tuebingen (Germany) and earned a Ph.D. in Heidelberg in Molecular Genetics in 1975. After a postdoctoral tenure at the University of California, San Francisco, he joined Genentech in 1978. His work in the field of signal transduction research has elucidated major fundamental molecular mechanisms that govern the physiology of normal cells and allowed insights into patho-physiological mechanisms of major human diseases.

For over 25 years Professor Ullrich has been a leader in gene-technology, translating basic science discoveries into medical applications. This led in the mid eighties to the development of Humulin (human Insulin for the treatment of diabetes; Lilly), the first therapeutic agent to be developed through gene-based technology and the first biotechnology product ever. Another biotech product that is based on Professor Ullrich's work is Herceptin, the first target-directed, gene discovery-based cancer therapy for the treatment of metastatic breast carcinoma (Genentech/Roche).

Since 1988, Professor Ullrich has been Director of the Department of Molecular Biology at the Max-Planck-

Institute of Biochemistry in Martinsried and in addition since 2004 he is Research Director of the Singapore OncoGenome Project.

Among numerous other honors and awards Professor Ullrich received the Robert Koch Prize, the Bruce F. Cain Memorial Award of the American Association of Cancer Research and the King Faisal Prize of Medicine. His scientific work has been published in more than 500 articles in international journals and with over 58000 citations he is one of the ten most cited scientists over the past 25 years worldwide.

Professor Ullrich has been a leader in international Biotechnology development with activities stretching from Germany, to the USA, Singapore and Australia. He is co-founder of three Biotech companies — SUGEN Inc. (USA), Axxima Pharmaceuticals AG (Germany), U3 Pharma AG (Germany) and Kinaxo (Germany).

In 2001 *Time Magazine* Europe has named Professor Ullrich as one of 25 European "tech leaders who are changing how we work, live and play." asmr

Calendar

ARCS 2007 Annual Scientific Congress

June 4–6, 2007
Sydney Convention and Exhibition Centre,
Darling Harbour
<http://www.arcs.com.au/annualconf.cfm?edit=a>

11th Australasian Autoimmunity Workshop

July 6 – 8, 2007
www.autoimmunity.monash.org

4th IAS Conference on HIV Pathogenesis, Treatment and Prevention

July 22–25, 2007
Sydney Convention and Exhibition Centre,
Darling Harbour
www.ias2007.org

8th National Prostate Cancer Symposium

Melbourne Cricket Ground,
Melbourne, Australia
Aug 8 – 10, 2007
For information contact the Symposium Co-ordinators
The PR Exchange PTY Ltd,
email: prex@pacific.net.au

14th International Congress on Genes, Gene Families and Isozymes

Salvador Brazil
Aug 15 – 18, 2007
www.cpqrr.fiocruz.br/14thICGGFI

NSC 2007 — Tissue Remodelling: Current Understanding and Future Therapeutic Targets

Convenors: Alaina Ammit
and Alistair Steward
Nov 11–14, 2007
The Carrington,
Katoomba, NSW

UNSW UNSW MEDICINE Faculty of Medicine

Research Strengths

During the years 2003–2004, the Faculty undertook a large-scale review of its research activities with a view to planning more rationally to better support and grow these activities over the coming decade. A major outcome of this activity was the identification of our areas of research strength as well as areas of emerging strength within the Faculty. The point of this exercise was not in any way to discourage research activity in areas beyond those identified, but to recognise the fact that research is an expensive exercise both in terms of dollars and in terms of personnel, and that sensible investment of these scarce resources requires knowledge of what we do well and careful decision making about future strategies.

Existing Strengths

Brain Sciences
Cardiovascular Research
Infection/Immunity/Inflammation

Emerging Strengths

Health Informatics
Policy and Practice Interface in Health Practice
Cancer Research

Postgraduate Research Programs

The postgraduate research programs offered by the Faculty involve a student undertaking an investigative project under the supervision of an academic. The investigation will culminate in the submission of a thesis that amongst other things, records the student's research methods, findings and results.

For more information, please refer to the following link:

<http://www.med.unsw.edu.au/medweb.nsf/page/Postgraduate+Research+Programs>

ASMR National Scientific Conference

Tissue Remodelling: Current Understanding and Future Therapeutic Targets

**The Carrington,
Katoomba, Blue Mountains NSW,
11th – 13th November 2007
Convenors: Alaina Ammit
and Alastair Stewart**

Tissue remodelling is associated with both normal and abnormal processes. The aim of the conference is to bring together researchers working in diverse disease areas in which tissue remodelling is a key feature (such as asthma, cancer, rheumatoid arthritis, reproduction, hepatic fibrogenesis and cardiovascular disease) to share their perspectives on the molecular and cellular mechanisms that control tissue remodelling and to elucidate future therapeutic targets to combat these diseases. We will be holding keynote orations, interactive symposia and poster sessions to explore the functions that cells undergo in order to remodel tissue in health and disease; including inflammation and cytokine production, migration, growth, apoptosis, matrix remodelling, cell phenotype and plasticity and tissue engineering. The Scientific Programming Committee has already confirmed invited speakers for the symposia and they include (so far): Fabienne McKay (Garvan Institute), Peter Currie (Victor Chang Cardiac Research Institute), Patrick Humbert (Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre), John Silke (La Trobe University), Nigel Waterhouse (Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre), Tim Hewitson (Royal Melbourne Hospital), Rik Thompson (St Vincent's Institute), Ashish Diwan (St George Hospital School and SpineMed), Edith Gardiner (University of Queensland), Sharon Ricardo (Monash University) and Geoff Lindeman (WEHI).

This is the first time in Australia that researchers working in diverse disease fields will have met together to compare and contrast cellular functions

that underlie tissue remodelling. It is our hope that the "Tissue Remodelling: Current Understanding and Future Therapeutic Targets" meeting will enhance exchange of ideas nationally and internationally and establish new ways of looking at common molecular pathways in a variety of clinical conditions. It will also be an excellent meeting for students with travel awards, presentation prizes and all the usual opportunities for networking.

And it gives me great pleasure to announce that the 2007 AWT Edwards Oration will be Professor Julie H. Campbell AO FAA (Centre for Research in Vascular Biology, Australian Institute for Bioengineering and Nanotechnology, University of Queensland).

It promises to be a great meeting in the beautiful Blue Mountains!

Hope to see you all there!

**Alaina Ammit
Alastair Stewart
Convenors ASMR NSC 2007
On behalf of the Scientific Programming
Committee: David Phillips, Mark Cooper,
Geraldine O'Neill, Levon Khachigian,
Alison Butt, Shireen Lamande, Ian Darby,
Ross Hannan, Kathy Traianedes,
Alexandra Sharland, Hala Zreiqat** 

**Early bird registration
and abstract
submission deadline:
September 1st, 2007.
www.asmr-nsc.org.au**

ASMR — Letters To The Editor

The aim of *Letters to the Editor* is to provide a forum for our members to voice their concerns and opinions regarding issues pertinent to health and medical researchers. The best "Letter to the Editor" received during 2007 will receive a \$100 prize.

Please submit letters by email to the ASMR Newsletter Editor (gildat@burnet.edu.au) by 11th June 2007 for inclusion in the July 2007 issue. Letters must be around 100 words in length.

Contributors should include their name and affiliation for publication. The Editor has the right to edit the content for clarity, publication is entirely at the discretion of the Editor and no correspondence will be entered into.

Letters to the Editor

Link Research Funding to GDP

The recent visit by the Prime Minister of Finland to Australia has highlighted their R&D success story and been a poignant reminder to us of our failure to make that similar transition from a resources boom town to a highly skilled technology driven nation. At present NHMRC grants are only grants in aid, i.e. they do not cover the real cost of salaries and doing the work leaving our scientists struggling

to be internationally competitive. One important key to the R&D success story is to link research funding to a percentage of GDP. Finland already contributes 3.5% of GDP ahead of the EU initiative to achieve 3% by 2010. Another small economy of only 8 million people, Austria, contributes 2.43%. It is clear what Australia needs to do.

Dr Elizabeth Grgagic
Burnet Institute

ASMR Directors 2007

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