

March 2009

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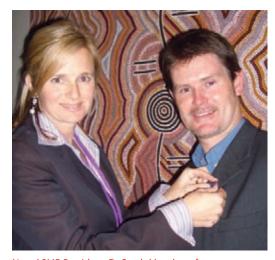
Medical Research

The ASMR has been a hive of activity — busily working to deliver a well-researched evidence-based case for the future funding needs of the Australian health & medical research (HMR) sector. We have been developing and strengthening a vital support program for ongoing training of our world-class HMR workforce, as well as showcasing to all Australians the benefits of medical research via our thrilling array of events to take place during ASMR Medical Research Week® 2009.

In terms of funding matters, ASMR applauds the HMR community of the USA for successfully winning a long running battle for an injection of investment into the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Flat funding over the past 5 years, combined with the force of biomedical research inflation, had a devastating effect on the NIH, eroding the momentum of discovery and improvements in the health and well-being outcomes of Americans. As part of President Obama's economic recovery bill, NIH have secured USD10 billion to help find a cure for heart disease, stroke and other cardiovascular diseases — an important down payment on Obama's pledge to double science funding over the next decade. This is an important step which recognises that NIH funding can help cure the economy as well as disease. It is a timely reminder that investment in the health sector should be considered as part of Australia's stimulus approach to our economic future.

...funding can help cure the economy as well as disease.

As you are aware, ASMR strongly advocates for continued support of Australia's world-class HMR sector and the protection of National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) funding in the 2009–10 Federal Budget. ASMR is working on a strategic approach to provide a well-researched, evidence-based case for further investment in HMR in the critical 'election' Federal Budget of 2010–11. It is a crucial period for the future of HMR, and now more than ever we must campaign for sustained support of the sector. HMR has enjoyed solid economic growth and support by the Federal Government over the past decade. However, the recent global economic downturn presents many



New ASMR President, Dr Sarah Meachem fastens an ASMR lapel pin on the outgoing President, Dr Mark Hulett

challenges for Australia and will undoubtedly produce budgetary constraints. To safeguard the sector from these constraints, we need to ensure that the exceptional value of HMR is clearly articulated and fully justified across the board (from the public to politicians and policy makers), and we are intensifying our lobbying efforts to ministers, advisors and departmental staff. Our long-term agenda is to define and develop sustainable funding strategies incorporating realistic and achievable mechanisms, allowing government dependent and independent investment in HMR to flourish. The short- and longrange funding forecast will remain the same cyclical and unpredictable — unless we do something about it! Key investments in research and researchers can lead to economic and knowledge-based loss if funding is not sustained. As part of this goal we continue to explore other models used internationally. One which may be appealing to Australia and the Asia-Pacific region is the 'value added' European 7 Framework Program. On a recent tour of Europe, I met with scientists and government officials instrumental in the development of the innovative policy reform program, where R&D investment in science is committed to investment of 3% of GDP by 2010; with some countries already exceeding this level of investment, thereby creating a dynamic research community which is building in momentum. ASMR is well-placed to provide a blueprint for a sustainable funding model. Such a model should protect our sector from funding troughs, which can erode investments and result in the potential loss of innovation capacity and associated health and economic benefits — a chapter in the life of the NIH we want to avoid.

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Health & Medical

Research Congress



The Australian Society for Medical Research

145 Macquarie Street, Sydney NSW 2000

ACN 000599235 · ABN 18000599235

Catherine West
Snr. Executive Officer

Ph: 02 9256 5450 Fax: 02 9252 0294 Email: asmr@world.net Web: www.asmr.org.au

Newsletter Editor-in-Chief, Dr Andrew J. Brown Print Post Approved

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At the heart of ASMR's remit is fostering ongoing training for our workforce, most notably and arguably our most vulnerable group — mid-career research scientists. We welcome the Government's commitment to support Australia's research and innovation capacity and the development of new knowledge, products and services in areas of national importance, as evidenced by many new initiatives to ensure a highly skilled and well-planned R&D sector. Most relevant, the government's commitment of \$326.2 million over 4 years to fund new Future Fellowships aimed at attracting and retaining Australia's mid-career researchers. This is a sensible approach to supporting the career of Australia's best and brightest scientists and to ensure that Australia maintains its competitive edge. Importantly, this initiative shows that the government recognises mid-career scientists are at a vulnerable stage in their career (termed in the sector as the 'fight or flight' moment). As part of ASMR strategy to bolster mid-career scientists, we continue to deliver a life-long national workforce training program in the form of professional development workshops and a career mentoring program. The professional development workshop will happen towards the end of August in 2009 and the application process is open for the Career Mentor Program. The mentor-mentoree linkage program is about to be simplified via a web-based approach. More information will be posted in due course.

ASMR's Medical Research Week® and the Medallist Tour are flag ship events for our society. I am delighted to share with you the much awaited announcement of the ASMR medallist for 2009, Professor Josef Penninger, Director of the Institute for Molecular Biotechnology of the Austrian Academy of Sciences in Vienna. He is a gifted and charismatic man — a man to reinforce the human aspects of the impact of ill health, the effects and outcomes of research and the possibilities it represents for the future. He is wellversed in innovative initiatives in HMR funding mechanisms in Europe and Canada. ASMR has dubbed him the 'Renaissance Man'. More on Professor Penninger's awards and achievements are highlighted in this issue.

As our members have come to expect, ASMR MRW® (May 28th-June 5th) 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 the Medallist Tour can be found on the ASMR website (http://www.asmr.org.au/). Save the dates and get involved!

A fixture on the HMR calendar is the biennial Australian Health and Medical Research Congress (AHMRC). The 4th AHMRC was held in Brisbane 2008 and was a booming success. Delegates were enthralled by an awe-inspiring array of national and international stars including a recent winner of the Nobel Prize for Chemistry, Roger Tsien. A full report of the congress is provided in this issue and I wholeheartedly thank Convenor Dr Alison Butt in organising and facilitating participating societies and special interest groups. Dr Greg Anderson, Scientific program convenor did a marvellous job in managing an outstanding program. We congratulate and thank all involved, particularly the participating societies and groups as the success of the congress relies on you. Finally, a special thanks to the professional support of ASN Events, Mike Pickford, Maree Overall and their team, who make such an enormous task seamless. The 5th AHMRC will be held in Melbourne in 2010 in the Convention Centre stay tuned for more information!

In keeping with themed meetings in the intervening years between the AHMRC, the 2009 ASMR National Scientific Conference (NSC) is on 'Neurogenetics' and will be staged in the Apple Isle, Hobart, from November 15th-17th. The ASMR convenor Associate Professor Martin Delatycki and Scientific Programming Chair Professor Nigel Laing are assembling an exciting program, which will be of interest to diverse disciplines (see the notice in this issue).

On NHMRC matters, ASMR supports an open, transparent and consultative process on all research policy issues. To this end, ASMR will be heavily involved in the consultations for the proposed changes for the development of the NHMRC's next Strategic Plan for the triennium; to sustain and grow research and its translation into health in Australia. In addition, ASMR will be actively involved in the consultative process of the proposed changes to the NHMRC Research Fellows Scheme. Both forums are expected to be held around mid-year.





Professor Josef Penninger

ASMR Medallist 2009

Josef Penninger is the Scientific Director of the Institute for Molecular **Biotechnology of the Austrian Academy of** Sciences, Vienna, Austria.

orn in Austria in 1964, he studied medicine, immunology and the history of arts in Innsbruck. Professor Penninger believes the keys to his success are passion, intellectual curiosity and determination. An enthusiastic believer in innovation, he attributes equal importance to an interdisciplinary approach

to science. At the Keys memorial Lecture at Trinity College, Toronto in 2004, he said "All great discoveries occur when scientists wander off the beaten track, pursuing unpopular, unknown ideas or merge knowledge from disparate fields".

He made the list of the 10 most cited scientists in the world two years in a row, was named as one of the 10 most promising scientists in all fields of science, one of the 10 most interesting people in America and recently the Austrian Scientist of the Year. The main focus of his work is on heart/lung, autoimmune, cancers and bone diseases.

Professor Penninger has produced a steady stream of groundbreaking studies across the breadth of immunology, and is a very fitting ASMR Medallist.



Women in Science

s there a need to discuss the topic of "women in science"? Of course there is. Although the contributions that women and men make to science are equal, they can be very different. Women bring diversity to any organisation and science is not different.

Our training as scientists includes developing our processes of lateral thought and our attention to detail, as we bring concepts or ideas to a reality. We are always thinking ahead and predicting outcomes, and re-routing our plans when unexpected or surprising results emerge. For women, we use these skills everyday in our family/personal lives where we juggle the needs of attention from our family, deal with the timetabling of the family members and work around unexpected events like broken bones or hospital visits. Our scientific endeavours benefit by employing these skills because we can bring focus and clarity to problems that need to be resolved, we can be innovative in our approaches and we can obtain outcomes no matter what the situation. Most importantly we bring passion and commitment that is an essential ingredient of any successful scientific career or role as partner or mother.

So all things being equal, what is the difference and is this why there are so few women in the top echelons of science? I believe an answer lies in the hurdles we face along the path to success. Initially, these may be low and frequent, but in later life the hurdles are fewer but harder to clear. Hurdles include the need to work unsociable hours when child-care is not available, to go to international conferences and meetings without our family, or to be writing grants when the rest

of the world is at the beach. Over the years, some of these barriers have fallen quickly; internet access anytime and anywhere has made all the difference to when and where we work and although it can be invasive, used appropriately this is a significant tool for women. One of the most difficult barriers is attitude. Even colleagues, who generally understand, can be quite unforgiving when the pressure is on. Bullying and aggressive behaviour is no less common, and although it is more readily recognised and dealt with by our institutions, it can be a deterrent for many women.

What can we do to make a difference for women in science? My view is that better mentoring is a key to success. Women don't generally develop their informal networks as well as men; but when they do, these systems can be very effective and prevent re-invention of the wheel. It is important that the networks include both men and women, mentoring women. Communication, information exchange and collaboration are key to scientific success, and need to be adopted in mentoring plans for women. Just as we plan our research, we need to seek information from people with the right experience in order to reach the outcomes we desire. When mentoring works, the relationships last a lifetime/career. To me, mentoring is like parenting and family life; an essential part of scientific life that equips us better for a career in science, enabling us to be scientist, daughter, wife and parent.





Professor Gail Risbridger

ASMR Mentoring Program

Are you a mid-career researcher without a mentor?

he Australian Society for Medical Research would like to invite members who are 5–12 years postdoctoral to participate in the ASMR Mentoring Program. This program was initiated as a result of feedback from participants attending the ASMR Professional Development program. Members will be matched with an appropriate Career Development Mentor.

For more information and application forms please visit

www.asmr.org.au/mentor.html

Please note that applications are accepted all year round and the program is free to ASMR members.

Emma Parkinson Lawrence, ASMR Executive Director

The ASMR Research Awards

ach 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 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 conducted 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.

Application forms are available from

http://www.asmr.org.au/Researchfund.html



Health and Medical Researchers benefit Australia

ere and around the world, all our biggest threats to health need solutions from research. The list is long, but includes:

- · effective vaccines for HIV
- · new drugs for tuberculosis
- better and more precise treatments for cancers
- a cure for high blood pressure and for Type 1 diabetes
- better detection of the early signs of chronic disease, so we know who needs treatment early
- better delivery of health services and,
- "closing the gap" in health between Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Australians.

Australia has an outstanding health and medical research workforce by any measure. Just to take one measure, a recent analysis shows that 2.4% of NHMRC-funded publications occur in the world's 1% most highly cited papers. We are punching well above our weight.

Added value

The main value of Australia's research community is our research discoveries. That will never change.

But a first class research workforce benefits Australia in many other ways. About 8,000 Australians are

employed on grants from NHMRC, most of them young. Many others who are employed by universities, institutes, hospitals and other health services, have their research supported by NHMRC. This is an incredible pool of talent that contributes to Australia by:

- ensuring that evidence pervades our delivery of health care
- being a ready resource of expertise and knowledge for governments, academia and the private sector
- teaching undergraduate and postgraduate students
- maximising the work of the charities
- being excellent role models of service and achievement — look at Australians of the Year — Fiona Stanley, Fiona Woods, lan Frazer, Sir MacFarlane Burnet, Sir Gus Nossal, Peter Doherty
- Attracting foreign capital investment (NHMRC estimates around 30 cents per NHMRC dollar)
- Helping form new profitable "21st century" industries for Australia
- Cementing Australia's reputation as an innovative country
- Supporting Australia's reputation as a good international citizen.



Professor Warwick Anderson after the NHMRC session at the 4th AHMRC, Brisbane.

He is flanked on the left by Dr Mark Hulett (ASMR President, 2008) and Dr Jia-Rui Wu (Shanghai Institutes for Biological Sciences), and on the right by Professor Cindy Shannon (Centre for Indigenous Health, University of Queensland),

Dr Alison Butt (AHMRC Convenor and ASMR President-Elect), and Professor Ian Frazer (Diamantina Institute).



Investigator-led research

The most important benefits to health come from the long term investment that governments make through investigator-led research. By its nature, the outcomes are unpredictable, very often long term, and usually just a small (though sometimes crucial) part of what ends up as a major advance. Such research has historically faced pressure from people who ask "but can we afford this right now?" It is heartening to see the comments by the US President, Barack Obama, that the USA should "put science back in its rightful place" and "if we aren't willing to pay the price for our values, then we should ask ourselves whether we truly believe in them at all".

"Put science back in its rightful place." Barack Obama

Knowledge transfer

A more immediate benefit from health research comes from the translation of research findings into the health system. Here in Australia, we have many outstanding examples of success — look at lan Frazer's work in developing a vaccine against the human papilloma virus. It will greatly reduce the number of women developing cervical cancer.

And think of the benefits that have come from Robin Warren and Barry Marshall's Nobel Prize winning

discovery that much gastritis and ulceration could be cured by a course of antibiotics, rather than chronic, costly treatment that alleviated symptoms but did not cure.

The future

The future is exciting and challenging! Exciting, because there are so many prospects for improving prevention and treatment. Amongst numerous examples, genomics will offer us opportunities to detect the onset of many diseases far earlier than now, and to target preventative measures and treatments much more effectively.

Without good quality research, it will be like "Groundhog Day" in Australian health

High quality research expands the horizons in health; it shows what has and has not worked in the past, and offers hope for a better future. Without good quality research, it will be like "groundhog Day" in Australian health — we will be stuck with repeating current inadequate preventative measures and treatments and we won't know how to improve the health of all Australians.

Warwick Anderson CEO, National Health and Medical Research Council

Early Bird registration and Oral abstract submission deadlines:

Friday 14th August 2009

Poster abstract submission deadline: Friday 25th September 2009

Hotel Grand Chancellor, Hobart Tasmania November 15-17th WWW.aSmr-nsc.org.au

The confirmed speakers for 2009

Professor Jonathan Flint — University of Oxford, UK 2009 AWT Firkin Orator

Professor Fiona Stanley — Telethon Institute for Child Health Research, Australia 2009 Edwards Orator

Dr Sharon Byers — University of Adelaide

Professor John Christodoulou — University of Sydney

ASMR NSC 2009:

Neurogenetics on the Apple Isle

Associate Professor Martin Delatycki — Murdoch Childrens Research Institute

Professor Richard Faull — University of Auckland

Associate Professor Josef Gecz — University of Adelaide

Professor Glenda Halliday — Prince of Wales Medical Research Institute

Associate Professor Anthony Hannon — Howard Florey Institute

Professor Nigel Laing — Western Australian Institute for Medical Research (WAIMR)

Professor Martin Lavin — Queensland Institute of Medical Research

Professor Kathy North — Children's Hospital at Westmead

Dr Kristen Nowak — University of Western Australia

Professor Peter Schofield — University of New South Wales

Professor Ingrid Scheffer — University of Melbourne

Themes

Muscle Diseases

Neuropsychiatric Disorders and Addiction Genetics and Biology of Learning and Memory Neurodegeneration Population Screening for Neurogenetic Disorders Therapies and Stem Cells Migraine, Epilepsy and Stroke Congratulation to our members who received Australian Fellowship Awards from the NHMRC for funding in 2009:
Professor Mark
Cooper

Professor Levon Khachigian

(ASMR President, 2006)

Congratulation to our members who were recognised as 'Young Tall Poppies' in 2008:

South Australia

Dr Alison Coates Dr Megan Mitchell

Victoria

Dr Kieran Harvey Dr Brendan Jenkins



Remembrance of times past: ASMR in the eighties



Professor Judith Whitworth,

ASMR President, 1984
Photo Courtesy of Karen Edwards, JCSMR

he eighties were great years for ASMR, and great fun for those of us who were lucky enough to be part of it. ASMR presidents from 1980–89 are shown in the adjoining box.

Over the decade, the Society became increasingly outward looking, engaging with research users as well as research providers.

The major initiative of the early eighties was the development of ASMR Medical Research Week®. John Eisman (President 1983) was very much the driving force. He kicked off the concept at a very well-attended meeting he held at his house in Hawthorn (suburban Melbourne) and Victorian Medical Research Week was born. A very active local medical research community got behind the idea and into schools, streets and shopping malls. The VMRW dinners, bringing together pollies, business and community, were well-supported and much enjoyed. After its success in Victoria the idea took off in NSW, and then in other states and territories where it is now established as a national institution. ASMR MRW® events around the country have introduced health and medical research to Australians of all ages and interests.

Lobbying was particularly intensive in the eighties, albeit initially in a rather amateurish fashion. We aimed (and I think successfully) to visit every federal politician, from all parties, as well as key bureaucrats. John McDougall (President 1988) and I formed a tag team and met a number of very interesting people and some less interesting. We argued the case for animals in research with Gareth Evans and were mightily entertained by Joan Child's stories of how the new Parliament House budget blow-out was contained:

"The cuts to ministerial courtyards can't apply to me..."

"My dear, yours will be the first to go."

We had robust encounters with people as politically diverse as Gerry Hand, Graham Richardson and Wilson Tuckey. Along the way, we learned to speak of investment rather than funding and were disabused of the notion that medical research was a self-evident good. It soon became apparent that the arguments around knowledge for its own sake cut no ice and that the medical research lobby was widely regarded as self-serving, and worse, ungrateful. It was reported that a senior minister had said in budget discussions that it wasn't worth giving those so-and-sos anything, as whatever they got they still whinged. Happily, a year later, the view was still that whatever we got we would whinge but at least the money would be well spent.

ASMR presidents, 1980-89

1980 — **G.G. Duggin**

1981 — **R.L. Dawkins**

1982 — **J.K. Findlay**

1983 — **J.A. Eisman**

1984 — **J.A.Whitworth**

1985 — **B.M. Hall**

1986 — **G.C. Farrell**

1987 — R.L. Sutherland

1988 — **J.G. McDougall**

1989 — **N.H. Hunt**

Over the years, we learnt to make the case. And some ministers were good friends to medical research: Jim Carlton and Neal Blewett come to mind. The medical research mafia (Coghlan, Chalmers, Funder, McCloskey et al.) were very supportive of the society and gave freely of their support and advice, the latter usually but not always solicited. They were an enormously valuable resource for the young Turks and worked vigorously for medical research behind the scenes.

Scientific meetings in the eighties were family friendly. People brought their partners and kids to places like Thredbo and Phillip Island. The singles partied hard. One meeting highlight, when Geoff Farrell (President 1986) was Program Secretary, was a talk from a brash youngster from Perth on bacteria in gastroduodenal disease — a very bizarre notion for many. Of course, Barry Marshall went on to share the Nobel Prize for this discovery involving Helicobacter pylori. The 25th anniversary meeting in Sydney featured a cricket match between past-presidents and current directors. John Chalmers was agile behind the stumps but I was run out by Barry Firkin (my batting partner) for a duck and the young whippies triumphed.

The great constant for the society was our outstanding secretary, Ruth Lilian, who held things together over the years while directors came and went, and was later most deservedly made an Honorary Life Member of the Society.

Above all, my abiding memory of ASMR in the eighties is how we all believed passionately in the Society and its work. That is something that has not changed.

Judith A. Whitworth ASMR President, 1984



The 4th Australian Health & Medical Research Congress, Brisbane 2008

The 4th Australian Health & Medical Research Congress held in Brisbane last November was another resounding success, cementing its place as a highlight of the health and medical research calendar.

Over 1,440 delegates enjoyed the outstanding multidisciplinary scientific program with contributions from 60 international speakers, 234 invited national speakers and well over 1,000 abstracts. A particular highlight each day was provided by the outstanding international plenary speakers: Elaine Fuchs (skin biology, stem cells), Roger Tsien (fluorescent markers of intracellular signaling), Josef Penninger (mechanisms of disease pathology), Steven Baylin (loss of gene function in cancer progression) and this year's Firkin Orator, Michael Karin (signalling in inflammation, infection and cancer).

The ASMR National Scientific Conference, "Epithelial Tissue Dynamics: From Stem Cells to Cancer", was also a great success, with excellent presentations and lively discussions on the themes of origin and development of epithelia, epithelial homeostasis and pathology, and emerging therapeutic approaches for epithelial diseases. Former Australian of the Year, Fiona Woods, spoke about wounds and healing in the 2008 AWT Edwards oration. This year the Campion-Ma-Playoust Memorial Award went to Clare Berry from the University of Western Australia.

The 4th AHMRC also generated extraordinary national and international media coverage, reaching more than 30 million people!

While the Brisbane weather put on a show of its own, it certainly didn't dampen the delegates' enthusiasm for scientific presentations and discussions, the latter enhanced by the buzzing atmosphere at the poster and Trade displays, and the energetic and highly entertaining efforts of the Congress Carnivale latino



Dr Alison Butt, 4th AHMRC Convenor and President-Elect, congratulates the winner of the CASS Foundation Best of the Best Student Poster Award (\$5,000): **Travice de Silva**, Pharmacology, Monash University

band, 'Chukale'. Many of the individual societies also hosted their own dinners for their members throughout the week.

My sincere thanks to the participating organisations and to all members of the organising committee, particularly to the Program Convenor, Greg Anderson and the ASMR NSC Convenor, Alejandro López. We are also extremely grateful for the generous support of our sponsors that enables meetings of this size and depth to continue. Last but certainly not least, enormous gratitude goes to ASN Events, Mike Pickford, Maree Overall and their hard working team for their professionalism and unwavering team spirit in coordinating this event.

We very much look forward to seeing you again at the 5th AHMRC in Melbourne in 2010, convened by ASMR Director, Rosie Keogh.

Alison Butt 4th AHMRC Convenor and President-Elect



Feathers fly at the Congress Carnivale



Nobel Laureate **Roger Tsien** takes informal questions after his plenary speech



The 2008 AWT Edwards Orator, **Professor Fiona Wood**



Winner of the 2008 Campion-Ma-Playoust Memorial Award: Clare Berry, University of Western Australia



Winner of the Merck Sharp and Dohme Best of the Best Poster Award: **Washington Sanchez**, School of Medicine, University of Queensland



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Contact details from www.asmr.org.au/Statebranch.html

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Australasian Society for Infectious Diseases
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Australian and New Zealand Society for Cell & Developmental Biology Inc
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Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists
Australian and New Zealand Obesity Society

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Australian Atherosclerosis Society Australian Physiological Society

Australasian Society of Clinical and Experimental Pharmacologists and

Toxicologists

Australasian College for Emergency Medicine Australasian College of Dermatologists

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Australian Diabetes Society

Australian Neuroscience Society Inc

Australian Rheumatology Association Australian Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology Inc

Australian Society for Parasitology Australian Vascular Biology Society

Cardiac Society of Australia and New Zealand Clinical Oncological Society of Australia

Endocrine Society of Australia Fertility Society of Australia

Haematology Society of Australia and New Zealand High Blood Pressure Research Council of Australia Human Genetics Society of Australasia Institute of Health and Biomedical Innovation

National Association of Research Fellows

Nutrition Society of Australia Inc

Paediatric Research Society of Australia and New Zealand

Perinatal Society of Australia and New Zealand
Royal ANZ College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists
Royal College of Nursing Australia
College of Nursing Australia

Society for Free Radical Research (Australasia)
Society of Obstetric Medicine of Australia and New Zealand

The Australian College of Ambulance Professionals
The Australian Medical Students' Association Ltd
The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Radiologists
The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists

The Royal Australasian College of Physicians
The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners

The Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia

The Society for Reproductive Biology
Thoracic Society of Australia and New Zealand
Transplantation Society of Australia and New Zealand

Western Australia Biomedical Research Institute

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Haemophilia Foundation of Australia

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