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October

2000

President's Report

NSC - Starting Lifelong Scientific Networks

The time is coming up fast for our 37th Annual NSC. This meeting is looking fantastic and is a credit to the local organising committee. Your support of this meeting is very important to its success. It is the most student friendly national conference and has traditionally been the place to start the scientific networks that can last a lifetime.

Public outreach activities enhanced

Our public activities have been given a boost by the Federal Government. ASMR now has in principle agreement with the Minister, Dr. Michael Wooldridge, to use \$100,000 per annum over the next three years in promoting medical research around Australia through our public Expos held during ASMR Medical Research Week^R. These are our most effective way of meeting the Australian public, where we de-mystify our research activities, allowing us to build mutual trust and understanding.

Consumers must be made aware that much of Australia's medical research cannot take place without their participation.

The need for trust and understanding were key points I conveyed in a meeting I attended with members of the Consumer Health Forum in August. In return I heard once again that we as scientists have done a rather poor job of explaining our research to the public. In addition, our tendency to strive for objectivity in activities such as clinical trials can leave patients

feeling cold and used. A simple example brought this home to me where the term "subject" is used to describe a patient when in fact their co-operation and involvement more closely requires the word "participant". The spectrum of participant disengagement and even disenfranchising ranges from subtle to blatant and often this can be simply boiled down to poor communication.

Communication builds trust

On the other hand, clear and regular communication by us, about our goals and needs as researchers would be enormously useful and very likely reduce the pressure for restrictions in research involving, and being paid for, by fellow Australians. Make no mistake the Consumer representation bodies are powerful and ignoring them is no solution. Indeed the confusion that has arisen over cloning, IVF and GMO foods in some cases where these three separate issues are pooled into one debate comes back to us as researchers. We have forged ahead of the debate and have not lead it with accessible information and clarity.

ASMR increases its medical and community base

I am enormously excited to have the Council on the Ageing (Australia) join ASMR as an associate. They value the role of medical research as it touches upon our aging population and we value their support when spreading the word about why medical research is so important to our health.

Dr Robert Ramsay



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President's Report

continued

This year we have built our base of representation through the affiliation of

- Council on the Ageing (Australia)
- Epilepsy Association of NSW
- Australian College for Emergency Medicine
- The Royal Australasian College of Physicians
- The Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia
- The Australian Faculty of Occupational Medicine
- The ANZ College of Anaesthetists
- The Royal ANZ College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists
- The Victorian Public Health Research & Education Council

Collectively ASMR now has a membership and affiliation base of around 113,000 Australians. Used creatively and constructively, this weight of numbers will be important during times of policy formation and framing of legislation that will allow us to continue to improve the job we do as researchers. In return the responsibility upon us to deliver and I emphasize communicate medical research advances has to be recognised.

Time to get behind the Science Capability review

The review of Australian science capability by Dr. Robin Battenham is out for consideration as a discussion paper. ASMR has attended an information forum and examined the report with intense interest. The efforts by FASTS in assisting in the development of this sober and balanced review are obvious and warrant congratulations. In a similar fashion to the Health and Medical Research Strategic Review chaired by Peter Wills, this report describes Australia's current position within the world, the consequences of ignoring the rapid expansion of overseas science and technology, and requests sensible and achievable targets of funding and action by Government. Perhaps it is unfortunate, but nevertheless it seems to be a

universal truth that Governments all around the world have had to lead and coax industry and business to invest in research and development. The vast majority of patents of discoveries still stems back to universities, even in the USA. So it is obvious that a strong science, engineering and technology base is dependent upon strong and responsive universities.

ASMR spreading the message

The message of support for the Batterham review, that ASMR took to Canberra recently was that medical research is built upon a strong science base too. Imagine, if you can, medical research without chemistry, physics and mathematics. It is simply impossible. Molecular drug design to population modeling for public health research, requires graduates trained in these enabling sciences. We, as medical researchers, look to the universities to continue to train excellent graduates to enable us to do our important work. *Three pillars of science hold up medical research, without one of these pillars the tripod falls over.*

ASMR's position is that we support this review in its strategic intent and will be writing to the Prime Minister to that effect. I will be urging each of our affiliate members to do the same. Three points that should be recommended are:-

- The doubling of the ARC budget over the next five years.
- The development of a strong science scholarship scheme to reduce the HECS fees paid by science, engineering and technology students and to encourage more students to enter such courses.
- Elevate the rewards to, and status of science trained teachers in our secondary schools and science graduates in other career positions.

*Rob Ramsay
President,
ASMR*

NHMRC Research Committee

Structure and Members



ASMR extends congratulations to the newly appointed CEO of NHMRC, Professor Alan Pettigrew.

Composition

Chair
Deputy Chair
Research Cmtee Exec

Grants Committee

Fellowship Committee

Training Awards Cmtee
Gene & Related Technologies Rsh
Advisory Panel (GTRAP)
Industry Committee
Animal Welfare Cmtee
Block Funded Institutes
Liaison Working Group

Warwick Anderson
Sally Redman
Warwick Anderson
Sally Redman
Brandon Wainwright
Nic Nicola
Brandon Wainwright
* Discipline Panels (20)
* Clinical Trials & Large Scale Studies Working Group
* Indigenous Australian health Research Advisory Panel
* Program Grants Interview Cmtees
Daine Alcorn
* Interview Panels (3)
Peter Fuller
Ron Trent
Nic Nicola
Elizabeth Grant (Interim Chair)
Warwick Anderson
Sally Redman

The Batterham Review

FASTS believes that The Chance To Change represents a one-off opportunity to commence a series of reforms no less important than the recent taxation reforms. Australia needs to build on its mainly commodity-based, old economy to create a new economy whose growth is inextricably linked with its intellectual resources in science, engineering and technology.

That these intellectual resources are now operating in an environment which is below world standards is beyond dispute: the entire scientific community is united behind the findings of this Report that lays bare the dwindling investment in these national intellectual assets. FASTS applauds the Chief Scientist for stating unequivocally that we need to re-invest significantly in these areas.

The Chance To Change complements and

Professor Sue Serjeantson - FASTS Perspective

reinforces the recommendations proposed in the recently released document Innovation - Unlocking the Future, the Report of the Innovation Summit Implementation Group. The two documents should be considered together to cover the spectrum of reform needed in our national knowledge and innovation base.

It is the role of organisations like FASTS to support this reform process by putting forward strategies, investment goals and cost-benefit analyses of this investment. The extent of the overlap of FASTS' own policies (see www.FASTS.org) with The Chance To Change recommendations underlines the groundswell of support for the Chief Scientist's blueprint for the nation's future prosperity.

Professor Sue Serjeantson
President,
FASTS

Research Ethics Review in Australia

new national guidelines for human research

All researchers undertaking research involving humans, including human tissue, should be aware of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans released by the NHMRC in August 1999. As of January 1, 2000, this statement now guides the deliberations of Human Research Ethics Committees (HRECs). The statement was prepared by the Australian Health Ethics Committee (AHEC), a principal committee of NHMRC, after four years of extensive public consultation. The National Statement may be downloaded from the NHMRC website at <http://www.nhmrc.health.gov.au/publicat/synopses/e35syn.htm>

New AHEC for the 2000-2003 triennium

The Federal Minister for Health, Dr Michael Wooldridge, announced the membership of

the new AHEC in August. Dr Kerry Breen, a physician and former ASMR member, takes over as chair from Professor Don Chalmers. AHEC has met once in September and has identified a work plan, much of which will be of particular interest to ASMR members. The work plan includes the following:

- Prompt completion and release of a Handbook to guide HRECs in interpreting and applying the National Statement
- Working with indigenous Australians to revise the Interim Guidelines for Research Involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- Giving high priority to developing and implementing a plan to provide greater support to HRECs. This is likely to include training/induction for new HREC members and regular regional workshops to bring together HREC members and researchers to share experience and problems

Multicentre clinical trials

Chapter 3 of the new National Statement addresses the ethical review of multicentre trials. It encourages HRECs to look to collaborate in various ways to minimise delays in assessing such research proposals. ASMR members in NSW and Victoria may not yet be aware that both States have developed common research application forms for HRECs. AHEC strongly supports these developments and will encourage other States to follow this example, hopefully seeing a common national form eventually. Both forms are available electronically as follows:

NSW

<http://www.ro.unsw.edu.au/ethics/human.htm>

Vic

<http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/phd/ethics/index.htm>

EB

The Latest Update

Enterprise bargaining remains a highly contentious issue in the medical research community.

Grants from the NHMRC and other Australian funding bodies do not account for salary increases in EB agreements. The onus is therefore on the researcher's employer (namely universities, hospitals, research institutes) to find additional dollars to meet this shortfall. The ASMR is frequently approached by our members, for information on the latest enterprise bargaining agreement updates. We believe the NTEU website is an excellent source of information. Details of the third round of bargaining agreements can be found at - <http://www.nteu.org.au/rights/ebagree/ebupdates/>



Dr Moira Clay

Dr Kerry Breen

39th National Scientific Conference

Dr Andrew Sinclair

“Bench to Bedside and Beyond”

Nov. 26-28, 2000 Hotel Sofitel, Melbourne

Bringing together basic research, clinical application and public health.

Plenary sessions will focus on: Diabetes, Colorectal Cancer, Asthma, Mental Health and Public Health issues. Each topic will endeavour to cover basic research to clinical applications and community impact. Concurrent Symposia will include topics on: Genomics, Proteomics, Bioinformatics, Research Highlights and Free papers. Students are encouraged to attend with oral presentation opportunities, workshop sessions and career advice from ASMR directors. In addition, there are three Medibank Private Student Awards worth \$5,000 each. The social program starts with a cocktail party at Melbourne's new Museum and a welcome by the Chairman of NH&MRC Prof. Saunders. The conference Dinner will be held at the Hyatt and will feature the Nigel Gray oration followed by dancing with “Fiona Thorn & The Camellia Quartet.”

Key speakers:

■ **Prof. Peter Goodfellow**, recently Professor of Genetics, Cambridge University and now Senior Vice-President Research Glaxo SmithKline “*Medical Genomics*”

■ **Dr. Rob Moodie**, Melbourne, CEO of Vic. Health “*Life, leisure and longing in 2050.*”

■ **Prof. Nancy Andreasen**, University of Iowa. “*Neurobiology of Schizophrenia*”

■ **Professor Sir Gustav Nossal**, Melbourne “*Aboriginal Health*”

■ **Dr. Nigel Gray: Melbourne**, “*Global Disease Prevention-Triumph and Tragedy*”

■ **Prof. Graeme Young**, Adelaide, “*Colorectal cancer: Diet and Drugs-prevention and intervention*”

■ **Prof. Ann Woolcock**, Sydney, “*Why don't all atopic people have Asthma?*”

See the conference web site for full program details, registration and abstract forms:

www.asnevents.net.au/nsc2000.htm
or Telephone: (03)-5983-2400

Conference News

Estrogens and Male Health
Boden Research Conference
Sydney

2 & 3 November 2000.
ANZ Theatre, Maritime Museum,
Darling Harbour.

Contact:

Postgraduate Cmtee in Medicine,
Edward Ford Building A27,
University of Sydney.
Ph 02 9351 3526.



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Email arcwa@arcwa.wa.gov.au Web Site www.arcwa.wa.gov.au

Australian Health and Medical Research Congress

Dr Bronwyn Kingwell

Australian Health and Medical Research
Congress 2002
Melbourne Conference and Exhibition
Centre
November 25th-29th 2002

The organisation for the proposed FASEB style Health and Medical Research Congress is progressing well. Currently four societies in addition to ASMR plan to hold their annual meeting as part of the Congress while another 15 societies have indicated that they will conduct workshops and/or symposiums and a further 8 societies are still conferring with their boards and councils. A meeting of representatives from societies conducting their annual scientific meetings as part of the Congress selected The Australian Science Network as the Congress Organiser from competitive tender.

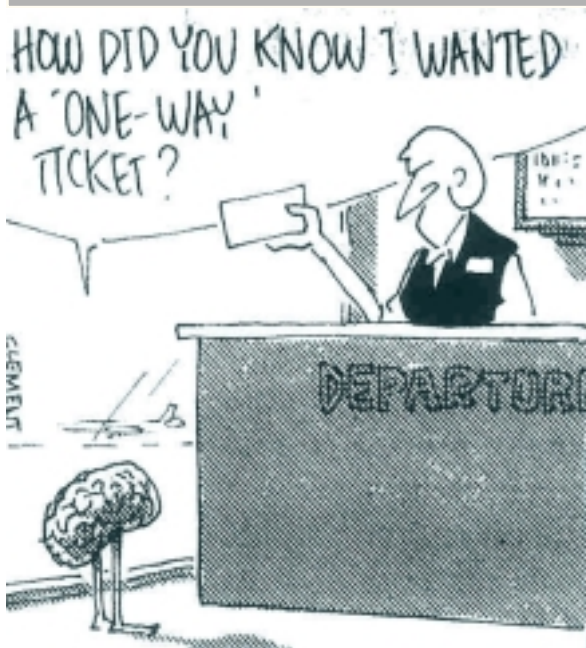
Societies are required to formally sign up for the Congress as soon as possible and preferably by October 30th. Plans are now in place to formally convene the organising committees so that we can move forward with the preparation and promotion of the event. Its not too late to sign up so any society not currently involved and those wishing to participate should contact:

Dr Bronwyn Kingwell
Head, Clinical Physiology
Baker Medical Research Institute
PO Box 6492, St Kilda Rd Central
Melbourne 8008
Tel 61 3 9276 3261,
Fax 61 3 9276 2495
Email b.kingwell@alfred.org.au



ASMR Workplace Survey

can be viewed and downloaded from
www.asmr.org.au/news



Our thanks to the Financial Review and
Rod Clement

ASMR Research Fund Award

The winner of the \$2000 ASMR Research
Fund Award Y2000 is
Raelene Lim
of the
Laboratory for Cancer Medicine in Perth,
Western Australia

The title of her study :

“Generation of knockout mice lacking the
novel kinase, M44”

to be undertaken at the:

Ludwig Institute for Cancer Research in
Melbourne.

To ASMR President, Dr Rob Ramsay from A/P Brian Dean

Dear Dr Ramsay

I have been a member of ASMR for many years and have watched its many reincarnations. In the July 2000 newsletter it seems you are suggesting that ASMR has evolved into yet another incarnation and that this incarnation is in some way superior to that which has gone before. You also seem to infer that ASMR is now achieving great things and is ready to be a force in the future development of medical research.

I'm afraid I must be related to the elephant as I have a long memory. Over 10 years ago I wrote a letter for publication as correspondence in the ASMR newsletter. This letter suggested that ASMR should not sing its own praises until it had achieved two important milestones which were:

1. That expenditure on medical research in Australia as a proportion of GDP place us in the top 30% of OECD nations.
2. That the salary of those in medical research in Australia had reached comparable levels with our colleagues in the USA.

Significantly, whilst publishing this letter was strongly supported by the then Secretary the Board decided it would not be appropriate for the letter to be published in the ASMR newsletter. From that point I vowed never to be naive enough to believe that ASMR was a Society that supported open debate about its direction and role in the medical research community.

However, having read your editorial singing your own praises I would ask you to contemplate whether, ten years from my buried letter, ASMR has come anywhere near reaching the two landmarks which I feel should be central to ensuring medical research continues to thrive in Australia.

Regards,

Associate Professor Brian Dean

NARSAD Research Fellow and Head, The
Rebecca L. Cooper Research Laboratories.

The response from Dr Rob Ramsay

Dear Brian,

Thank you for your letter, the first of its kind that I have received during my two years as past Newsletter editor (1997-8), president-elect (1999) and now President (2000). All other letters we have received I might say have been supportive. Nevertheless you have some very valid points.

In the interests of balance I feel a few points in

support of the ASMR board and all the individuals who devote their time to medical research advocacy bear repeating. There is no doubt that ASMR is now considerably more influential and effective than 10 years ago. As evidence I note we have a supporter base of 113,000 Australians through 38 societies, 7 medical colleges, 13 foundations, two committed and loyal staff in our Macquarie Street office in Sydney, an annual turnover exceeding a half a million dollars and more public contact time and events than ever. Importantly, we have developed strong working relationships with Dr. Michael Wooldridge, Ms. Jenny Maklin and Ms. Meg Lees and their advisers who between them drive either health policy and/or debate in this country. This has grown incrementally through the efforts of many board members and office bearers over many years. Our opinions are frequently sought and acted upon but indeed we still have much to do. The present and previous boards have chosen to engage policy makers with the intent of improving our relative OECD placing with regard to medical research spending and to improve salary levels. Without this constant dialogue our current status would be worse. Similarly, public criticism may offer personal comfort but in my opinion is generally less productive than aiming to achieve small improvements on a regular basis through political engagement.

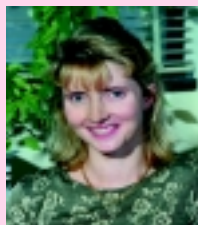
Brian, I am guilty of praising the present and past ASMR crew because they have worked harder than most in moving medical research forward. Finding the balance between doing something for the larger good and not falling foul of those who believe ASMR workers are not serious about their research is a very demanding exercise. The debate is not about what is needed but rather why is it so hard to find more than a dozen young, committed researchers to our bimonthly branch meetings. Therefore, I look forward to seeing you at the next Victorian branch meeting with your advice as to how we might do better at achieving the goals you have set.

Yours sincerely,
Rob Ramsay

Minister's Prize for Achievement in Life Sciences

ASMR congratulates Dr Una Morgan

In a joint media release earlier this month, the Prime Minister Mr John Howard and Senator Nick Minchin announced the Prime Minister's Prize for Science along with two young scientist awards, the Malcolm McIntosh Prize for Achievement in the Physical Sciences and the Minister's Prize for Achievement in Life Sciences. Dr Una Morgan, of Murdoch University was awarded the Minister's Prize for Achievement in Life Sciences for her research on the parasites *Cryptosporidium* and *Giardia*. Dr Morgan is an ASMR Member and Honorary Treasurer for the West Australian Branch of the Society. The Prime Minister's Prize for Science was won by Dr Jim Peacock and Dr Liz Dennis, both of CSIRO Plant Industry for their work on plant genetics.



Olympic Torch Bearer

Dr Judy Halliday, ASMR Past Director



ASMR's President-elect Dr Peter O'Loughlin with other members of the Strategic Advisory Committee of the John Curtin School of Medical Research meeting in Canberra



From left: Ms Pru Goward, Dr Peter O'Loughlin (ASMR), Prof Steve Redman, Prof Peter Doherty, Dr Denis King, Dr Alan Finkel, Professor Judith Whitworth, Mr David Vos, Prof Colin Johnston,

TOXICITY TESTING

Pharmatox is a well established toxicology laboratory working to international guidelines of the OECD and is a GLP and GMP registered laboratory, specialising in pre-clinical toxicology including pharmacokinetics, toxicokinetics and a wide range of pharmacopoeal tests.

Pharmatox

For further information contact:

Dr A. G. Bolt

Tel: (02) 9654 1623 Fax: (02) 9654 1754

The Australian Society for Medical Research,

ACN 000 599 235 ABN 18 000 599 235

145 Macquarie Street, Sydney 2000. Ph: 02 9256 5450, Fax: 02 9252 0294, Email: asmr@world.net

Website: www.asmr.org.au

Exec. Officer Catherine West

Newsletter Ed: Dr Lyn Griffiths