



The first Australian Health and Medical Research Congress (AH&MRC) held in Melbourne in the last week of November was undoubtedly an experiment that worked!



Opening the Congress

From left (back) Dr Moira Clay, ASMR President 2003, Dr Bronwyn Kingwell, Congress Convenor, Professor Sir Gus Nossal, His Excellency, Dr Peter Hollingworth, Governor General of Australia, Professor Peter Schofield, ASMR President 2002. From left (front) Mrs Hollingworth, Dr Sally Stansfield (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation)

Quotable Quotes

"Great meeting, great venue, good idea every few years."
John Chalmers, Institute for International Health, University of Sydney, NSW, (HBPRC & APPS Society member)

"I thought that the chance to go and choose from a variety of disciplines was great. Also met a whole lot of people in the one place. I cannot afford to attend meetings of four societies listed below each year because of the travel and time constraints - this was one way of doing it relatively cheaply."
(Delegate member of APPS, HBPRCA, PSANZ & ASMR)

"The combined ASHM/ASID sessions went very well. The HIV vaccine talks were followed by a high level discussion involving Peter Doherty and his experience with HIV vaccine development at St Judes. The symposium on lipids in HIV/AIDS and other immunosuppressed patients brought together a number of internationally renowned researchers in the area, it started with a series of excellent talks and ended with a proposal for a collaborative NIH grant in response to a recent NIH RFA on HIV and lipids".
Steve Wesselingh, Director, Burnet Institute, Melbourne Victoria

The Congress was the brain-child of Professor Steve Wesselingh (now Director of the Burnet Institute in Melbourne), during his ASMR Presidency in 1998.

Aims and Hypothesis:

The underlying hypothesis was simply, that since fundamental biological mechanisms are relevant across disciplines, scientists from disparate research areas who rarely meet, probably have a lot to offer each other. The primary aim of the Congress was thus to bring together scientists from different research areas to promote cross-pollination between disciplines.

Results:

The overwhelming response from the scientific community indicated that our hypothesis was true.

- Registrations from the 25 participating specialty societies topped 2000.
- The program featured 36 invited international speakers and over 700 free communications.

The biggest dilemma faced by most delegates was which, of the up to 10 concurrent sessions including over 200 invited speakers, to attend.

Throughout the week the trade/poster/meals area had an interactive vibe and provided a great venue to cement collaborations. Plans for collaborative experiments, grants and papers were hatched during tea breaks, lunchtimes and happy hours.

The dinner, attended by Senator Kay Patterson, the Commonwealth Minister for Health and Ageing was another highlight. Master magician Tim Ellis and international guest speaker and good sport, John O'Shea were closely scrutinized but still managed to amaze the cynical scientific audience.

Dr Bronwyn Kingwell



At the Dinner

From left, Professor Peter Doherty, Senator Kay Patterson, Commonwealth Minister for Health and Ageing, Dr Moira Clay, ASMR President 2003



Dr Sally Stansfield, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (opening address)



Professor Ed Harlow Harvard Medical School (final plenary)

Quotable Quotes

“This was one of the finest meetings that I have attended. Thank you for the opportunity to attend.”

Rhian Touyz, Clinical Research Institute of Montreal, Canada.

“I met a pharmacologist who has perfected a method for measurement of GIT fluids in vivo. I am visiting his lab in Feb 2003 to learn his technique. I would not otherwise meet him at a parasitology or ASMR conference. I made a number of valuable contacts.”

Anthony Armson, W.A. (ASMR & ASP Society member)

“Wonderful opportunity to show research administrators aim to help, not hinder research and want to be viewed as allies not enemies in the difficult task of sustaining research resources.”

Bob Seamark, Flinders Medical Research Institute, S.A. (ARMS Society member)

“Ability to cross between societies was the highlight for me. Several non-ACCEPT symposia were particularly relevant to my interests (eg. transplantation).”

Ray Morris, The Queen Elizabeth Hospital, S.A. (ASCEPT Society member)

The Congress received extensive media coverage in Australia and internationally with more than -

- 60 print media stories
- 45 radio interviews
- 20 television hits

A range of diverse topics were covered in press releases throughout the Congress, including

- Infectious diseases and vaccine
- Muscle repair
- Child obesity
- Stress and fertility
- Heart disease
- Infertility
- Junk food
- Reconstructive Surgery
- Hearing loss
- Biosecurity
- Red Wine and heart attack

We thank the many speakers at the Congress who were interviewed and graciously complied with press deadlines.

Media coverage such as this is important for promotion of health and medical research and was particularly opportune as the time draws near to evaluate the output from the increase in NHMRC funding which flowed from the Australian Health and Medical Research Strategic Review.

Quotable Quotes

“Attended some stunning ‘overview’ talks in areas I would normally never attend (specialist societies) and made at least two new collaborations with people in societies whose meetings I never attend, plus obtained request from potential top PhD student (overseas) to study with us.”

Miranda Grounds, University of WA (MBSANZ Society member)

“Biomedical research is best served by having a meeting of all major societies at the one time, in the one place.”

David W Walker PhD., D.Sc, Dept. Physiology, Monash University, VIC. (PSANZ Society member)

“The meeting gave a great opportunity to renew relationships (both scientific and social) with colleagues in diverse disciplines that I hadn’t seen in years.”

Phil Burcham, University of Adelaide, S.A. (ASCEPT Society member)



*Senator Kay Patterson
Commonwealth Minister for Health
and Ageing
Speaking at the Congress Dinner*



Delegates at the Welcome Function



*Dr Bronwyn Kingwell
Congress Convenor*



Some of the many hard working Program and Organising Committee Members at the Dinner

Major Prizes Awarded at the Australian Health and Medical Research Congress

Merck Sharp and Dohme

Poster Prize

won by

Dr Paul Smith,

University of South Australia

CASS Foundation

PhD Student Award

won by

Mark Chong,

Walter and Eliza Hall Institute

Highlights of the Congress
were numerous,
extending from the opening
address
delivered by
Dr Sally Stansfield
from the
**Bill and Melinda Gates
Foundation** to the
final plenary delivered by
Professor Ed Harlow
from **Harvard Medical School**

Plans are already underway for the second Australian Health and Medical Research Congress in Sydney in 2004. The second Congress will be convened by Dr Maria Kavallaris (Children’s Cancer Institute). If you enjoyed AH&MRC 2002 then I urge you to lobby your society to sign up for 2004.

Expressions of interest should be directed to Ms Cath West, Snr. Executive Officer, ASMR, 145 Macquarie Street, Sydney, NSW. Telephone 02 9256 5450, Fax 02 9252 0294, Email: asmr@world.net

Acknowledgements:

Thanks to all the participating societies and especially the society representatives on the local organizing committee below. Your spirit of co-operation and collaboration was what made the Congress work. Special thanks to the program committee headed by Wayne Phillips. We couldn't have done it without the superb organization provided by Mike Pickford and Maree Overall and their team from the Australian Science Network.

Local Organising Committee -

Bronwyn Kingwell, Convenor, Baker Heart Research Institute
Wayne Phillips, Program Convenor, Peter MacCallum Cancer Inst.
Mike Pickford, Australian Science Network Pty Ltd
Maree Overall, Australian Science Network Pty Ltd
Australian Physiological & Pharmacological Society (APPS)
Graham Lamb, La Trobe University
Australasian Research Management Society (ARMS)
Sianna Panagiotopoulos, Austin Hospital Medical Research Fndn.
Australasian Society of Clinical and Experimental Pharmacologists and Toxicologists (ASCEPT)
Greg Dusting, Howard Florey Institute, **Julianne Reid**, RMIT Uni.
Australian Society for Medical Research (ASMR)
Ricky Johnstone, Peter MacCallum Cancer Institute
Australasian Society for the Study of Obesity (ASSO)
David Cameron-Smith, Deakin University
High Blood Pressure Research Council of Australia (HBPRCA)
Margaret Morris, University of Melbourne
Victorian Breast Cancer Research Consortium (VBCRC)
Ian Campbell, Peter MacCallum Cancer Institute,
Jane Visvader, Walter and Eliza Hall Institute
Australian Atherosclerosis Society (AAS)
Richard O'Brien, Monash Medical Centre
Australian Diabetes Society (ADS)
James Best, The University of Melbourne
Australian Rheumatology Association (ARA)
Nick Manolios, Westmead Hospital; **Evangeline Romas**, St Vincent's Hospital
Australasian Society for HIV Medicine (ASHM)
Steve Wesselingh, Burnet Institute
Australasian Society for Infectious Diseases (ASID)
Stephen Kent, The University of Melbourne
Australian & New Zealand Society Nephrology (ANZSN)
Peter Tipping, Monash Medical Centre
Australian Society for Parasitology (ASP)
Mark Sandeman, La Trobe University
Australian Vascular Biology Society (AVBS)
Rod Dilley, Baker Heart Research Institute
Cardiac Society of Australia & New Zealand (CSANZ)
Salvatore Pepe, Baker Heart Research Institute & Alfred Hospital
Fertility Society of Australia (FSA)
Gayle Jones, Monash Institute of Reproduction & Development
Human Genetics Society of Australia (HGSA)
David Thorburn, Murdoch Children's Research Institute
International Society for Heart Research (ISHR)
Salvatore Pepe, Baker Heart Research Institute & Alfred Hospital
Matrix Biology Society of Australia and New Zealand (MBSANZ)
Erik Thompson, St. Vincent's Hospital
National Association of Research Fellows (NARF)
Graham Baldwin, Austin & Repatriation Medical Centre
Perinatal Society of Australia & New Zealand (PSANZ)
Richard Harding, Monash University; **Megan Cock**, Monash Uni.
Society for Reproductive Biology (SRB)
Anne Turner, Monash University
Thoracic Society of Australia & New Zealand (ThSANZ)
John Wilson, Alfred Hospital
Transplantation Society of Australia & New Zealand (TrSANZ)
Charmaine Simeonovic, John Curtin School of Medical Research
Programme Committee -
Wayne Phillips (Programme Convenor), Peter MacCallum Cancer Institute
Bronwyn Kingwell (Congress Convenor), Baker Heart Research Inst.
Ricky Johnstone (ASMR), Peter MacCallum Cancer Institute
Greg Dusting (ASCEPT), Howard Florey Institute
Margaret Morris (HBPRCA), The University of Melbourne
Graham Lamb (APPS), La Trobe University
David Cameron-Smith (ASSO), Deakin University

A venture of this size requires considerable support. The Congress was fortunate to have backing not only from the participating societies, but also from both State and Federal government and from Australia's academic institutions. Industry support was also critically important and the large trade display complemented the scientific presentations.

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