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JCSMR's 1996 Annual Report Presentation to Council

The 1995 Maclaren Review of the School emphasised that JCSMR was established to be a place of international excellence in medical research, and we were encouraged to continue this quest for excellence. Here in 1996 this standard of outstanding international excellence has once again been recognised - this time by the award of the Nobel Prize for Physiology or Medicine to Professor's Doherty and Zinkernagel. This prize was awarded for work carried out in the School during the 1970's. Another major achievement for a scientist working within the School was the award of the Australia Prize to Professor Laver, along with three other scientists for their work in the area of rational drug design. The University can certainly be proud of these continuing achievements of the JCSMR.

Gender distribution over the last four years

We have been working towards increasing the relative proportion of females at various academic levels within the School. We have had some success in this area and there are currently recommendations for appointments to levels D and E which will give us 50% female representation at level D and will provide us with a female appointment at the level of full professor.

External funding support

The unsupplemented salary increases that flowed through in 1996 placed a major strain on our budget situation. These salary increases represented 21 positions across the School and amounted to a dollar figure of approximately $0.9 million. The School has managed to cope with this Government requirement for an "efficiency dividend" by some restructuring and also by moving some staff members from the School's operating budget to grant and industrial support. 1996 was a good year in this regard and if you turn to page 80 of the report you will see that the School brought in approximately $8 million in external support funds.

The move towards the clinical interface

As a medical research institution we must be ever aware of the need to demonstrate the clinical relevance of our activities. However, because of the current tight financial situation, we have been attempting to move in this direction without diverting either our basic research interest or recurrent funding from the School's primary mission which is to investigate the cellular and molecular basis of medicine.

The School has an outstanding track record in terms of contribution to world medicine that has flowed from the conduct of fundamental research. However, this need to

demonstrate continuing clinical relevance of a basic science institute such as the JCSMR poses both administrative and academic problems. These arise because clinical researchers are largely goal oriented while basic biomedical science is concerned with the gathering of new knowledge. Our solution to this problem has been to encourage the development of a National Health Sciences Centre (NHSC) here in Canberra which will focus on both biomedical research, medical education, clinical research and the delivery of health services. If the JCSMR can successfully participate in this organisation, of which it is a founding member, the School can continue its basic science within a broader medical context. The aim of this organisation is to fund clinical interactions from industrial support and funds derived from granting agencies. In this way , the School will be able to maintain its basic science focus within a clinically relevant context.

A step in this direction has been made with the assistance of a $2 million grant from BioDiscovery Limited to fund a clinical/basic research project over three years. This project involves the trial of a vaccine in relation to the control of diabetes. This trial will be coordinated through the group here in Canberra, but will be a national trial involving recruitment of patients from hospitals in Melbourne, Canberra and Sydney.

This project is an excellent example of how new knowledge derived from basic science activities of the School can be transferred to its clinical endpoint with the assistance of external grant funding.

Strategic planning

This year saw completion of the Medical Genome Centre which will operate under the direction of Professor Chris Goodnow. It has been said that 20th century science was built on chemistry and atomic physics. We can now predict with some confidence that 21st century science will be greatly influenced by genetics and its relationship to the molecular understanding of biological phenomena. This new initiative which takes the JCSMR into the area of genomics, positions us very well for the development of the School as we pass into the 21st century. The School structure will need to be very flexible if we are to capture the new developments most effectively.

We continue to work on our strategic planning activities with maximisation of flexibility as a goal, and we are considering the introduction of one-line budgets to individual investigators within the School. The principle here is to have decisions on resource allocation made as close as possible to the point where funds are expended. The level of funding will be dependent on academic level and investigators will be encouraged to supplement such base funding with income from other external sources. The School will retain approximately 2% of the operating grant for research enrichment by way of grants

to[redacted]boratories or interactive programs. This move is aimed at encouraging the development of inter- and intra-divisional programs with the one-line budgeting process providing the flexibility that allows such programs to develop and evolve spontaneously.

In conclusion I would say that 1996 has been an outstanding year of achievement for both the John Curtin School and its contribution to the University as a whole.