



MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE AUSTRALIAN SOCIETY FOR MEDICAL RESEARCH (ASMR) AND REPRESENTATIVES OF AFFILIATE MEMBER SOCIETIES AND MEDICAL COLLEGES HELD AT THE VIBE HOTEL RUSHCUTTERS BAY, NSW (100 BAYSWATER ROAD, RUSHCUTTERS BAY) COMMENCING AT 4:45PM ON MARCH 24, 2015

Present for ASMR: Dr Phoebe Phillips (Chair), Dr Luke Hesson, Dr Andrew Burgess, Dr Brigid Lynch, Dr Rebecca Patrick, Dr Daniel Johnston

For Affiliate Member Organisations:

Dr Robert Guaran	Treasurer	Perinatal Society of ANZ
Natasha Carragher	Representing	Society for Mental Health Research
Prof John Rasko	President	The Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia
Professor Garry Jennings	Director	Baker IDI Heart & Diabetes Institute
Prof George Mellick	Representing	The Eskitis Institute
Sally Dunwoodie	Representing	ANZ Society for Cell & Developmental Biology

Attending: Catherine West

Item 1 – Dr Phoebe Phillips - Welcome, Apologies, Confirmation of Minutes (2/09/14)

Dr Phillips opened the meeting at 5pm, welcoming all present and tabling the following apologies:

ASMR: Dr Sarah Meachem, Dr Roger Yazbek, Dr Joanne Bowen, Dr Bryan Day, Dr Antonia Pritchard

Affiliate Member Organisations

Dr Genevieve Goulding	President	ANZ College of Anaesthetists
Dr Anthony Cross	President	Australasian College for Emergency Medicine
Dr David Beaumont	President	Australasian Faculty of Occupational and Environmental Medicine
Professor David Mackey	Director	Lions Eye Institute Limited
Prof David J Adams		Health Innovations Research Institute (HIRi)
Prof Anthony Cunningham	Exec Director	Westmead Millennium Institute for Medical Research
Dr Vanessa Tyrrell	Hon Treasurer	Human Genetics Society of A'asia
Dr Mary Kavurma	Representing	Australian Vascular Biology Society
Dr Rosetta Martiniello-Wilks	President	Australasian Gene Therapy Society
A/Prof Yvonne Zurynski	Representing	RACP

Dr Brigid Lynch moved that the Minutes of the previous meeting be accepted as a true and accurate reflection of that meeting; seconded by Dr Luke Hesson

Item 2 – President and Portfolio Reports:

Dr Phillips advised that she felt extremely privileged and honoured to represent the health and medical research sector as the 54th ASMR President. .

Dr Phillips spoke of the significant squeeze on funding which is creating anxiety about job security and career prospects. This is no surprise, given 2014 NHMRC project grant success rates were below 15% and are the lowest in our history. These funding rates mark a significant drop of over 8% since 2011.

The sad reality is that over 45% of last year's applications were considered fundable, but remain unfunded due to budgetary constraints.

In addition the total NHMRC budget allocation in 2014 was just over \$778 million, which is less than the 2008 investment (\$784 million) where the project grant success rates were 27%. Most recently, government announced that the ARC future fellowship scheme will be discontinued – this is a huge blow for mid-career researchers and will have significant negative implications on the sector. If we don't act immediately, this reduced investment into health and medical research will result in attrition of a world-class, highly skilled and productive workforce and also negatively impact our capacity to improve health outcomes.

Currently our Government invests 0.6% of the health portfolio spend into NHMRC for health and medical research, which has remained static since 2011. In reality, this has resulted in a significant loss of support for the sector. This is of critical concern given that Australia faces unprecedented health and economic challenges over the next 50 years, due to an ageing population and increased chronic diseases.

Last year, health and medical research received overwhelming publicity due to the Government announcing the Medical Research Future Fund (MRFF) in the May Budget. In recent meetings with government I have been assured that Minister Ley is committed to finding the promised funds so that the MRFF will go ahead, although a significant delay is expected. I am committed to making sure Government recognises the value of investment into health and medical research, and commits to an increased and sustainable investment model to the NHMRC (with or without the MRFF), thus securing the future health of all Australians.

In our recent pre-budget submission to the Federal Government, ASMR has requested that investment be immediately lifted in the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) to 1% of total health expenditure (this requires an immediate injection of approx. \$300M). Even if the MRFF goes ahead, the sector will not see any significant increase in research funding until 2017-18 (as highlighted in our recent Deloitte report). In addition, we have asked that Government commit to incrementally increasing investment for health and medical research to reflect 3% of total health expenditure by 2023. This evidence based investment strategy will have a conservative **saving of \$25.9 billion to the Australian Economy**, as well as significantly improve health outcomes for all Australian's. In addition, we have noted that due to the additional squeeze on funding, the mid-career researchers are particularly vulnerable and this year I will be emphasising the importance of additional people support to ensure succession planning for our sector into the future.

Our biggest challenge at the present time is to secure an immediate injection of funds into NHMRC to claw back the loss of intellectual capital which a 14% success rate represents.

This is a difficult call in the current political landscape which presents us with a minefield of confounding issues. Many in Canberra see the sector as already well-funded, greedy and elitist. Some have expressed the view that long life for Australians is not a sound economic goal.

The volatile nature of politics in Australia in 2015 means that it is more important than ever before that the sector speaks with one voice. That voice needs to be articulating very clearly, an evidence-based case in language which is understood by all political parties and spells out their responsibility to the future health and economic wellbeing of all.

It is my hope that everyone in this room today will take back to their colleagues and membership, a clear message that their help is needed. The evidence of the exceptional returns on investment in HMR cannot be denied and this evidence needs to be used to support our case through what we know to be one of the most powerful advocacy tools at our disposal. Writing, in your own words, to your MP about the health and economic welfare of this country into the future, your passion for research and the difference it can make to the lives of people is powerfully persuasive. It can be incredibly persuasive in marginal electorates.

ASMR will be circulating our recommendations for some specific language which should be included in these communications.

I will be continuing strategic meetings with politicians, advisers, bureaucrats and committees to inform, to educate and to encourage their championship of an immediate investment into NHMRC to safeguard the valuable intellectual capital the sector represents and reap the benefits of previous investment in both health and economic terms.

ASMR ran its annual National Scientific Meeting in November last year in conjunction with the 7th Australian Health and Medical Research Congress in Melbourne. This meeting highlighted the potential and future of transdisciplinary research. Despite a highly successful and interactive program, ASMR noted that in the current climate the Congress Model of bringing together several societies is difficult to achieve and we have decided to carefully evaluate its future potential. Thus our 2016 meeting will be a stand-alone ASMR national scientific conference.

ASMR's hard working Directors and State Committee members are currently organising this year's ASMR Flagship Advocacy events: ASMR Medical Research Week® and the ASMR Medallist Tour. The tour will include visits to all states between 28th May- 5th June. So I encourage all members to save the dates and remember that the events in ASMR Medical Research Week® provide opportunities for researchers to present their work, engage with members of the public, engage with key government stakeholders and foster networking and collaboration. I am pleased to announce this year's ASMR Medallist is Professor Ashok Saluja (University of Minnesota, USA).

He is a champion for translation from the bench to the bedside and is committed to finding a cure for pancreatic cancer as it is one of the most lethal of all cancers. Dr Phillips advised that, having personally worked with Ashok during her first post-doc, and together identifying a novel compound which is highly effective at killing pancreatic cancer cells, it is highly rewarding to see him develop a second generation compound called *Minnelide*™. This compound kills tumours in several models of pancreatic cancer in mice. This novel drug is currently being tested in phase 1 clinical trials in human patients with pancreatic cancer. The scientific community is eagerly awaiting the outcome of this trial in patients because currently the best drug we have for pancreatic cancer only prolongs life by 12 weeks.

While on this topic, I would like to ask our Director Dr Rebecca Patrick to update you on other highlights of **ASMR Medical Research Week®**

Dr Patrick spoke of ASMR MRW® as the premier public outreach event of the society. She referred to the tour by the ASMR Medalist, gala dinners, scientific meetings and presentations, awards, 'dinner with a scientist', 'science in the cinema, pub and museum', schools quiz, schools visits and career events, all bringing into public focus the health and medical research message which reaches millions of Australians through our strategic media program throughout the week. Dr Patrick acknowledged and thanked the hard working state committees who underpin all of our events.

Dr Phillips advised that this year we are pleased to announce our **National Scientific Conference** will be held in Adelaide from the 16th-19th November. The theme for this year's meeting is **Bugs, Bowels and Beyond: Innovations in Digestive Health and Disease Research**. She introduced Dr Luke Hesson, the NSC Convenor

Dr Hesson, also speaking on behalf of the Program Organising Convenor, Dr Joanne Bowen, advised that the meeting will be held at the Stamford Hotel in Adelaide and that the theme of "Bugs, Bowels and Beyond: Innovations in Digestive Health and Disease Research" does not mean that the meeting is limited to these fields, all researchers are welcome and we particularly encourage students and early post-docs to submit an abstract. Our program organizing committee is bringing together an exciting meeting with both the Firkin and AWT Edwards Orators locked in at this time. Our Firkin Orator is Professor Elan Erina from the Weizmann Institute of Science, Israel and the AWT Edwards Oration will be given by Professor Nick Tally from the University of Newcastle. The meeting will also include a professional development workshop

Dr Phillips introduced Dr Daniel Johnstone to report on the **Media Portfolio**

Dr Johnstone advised that the main purpose of this portfolio is to use traditional media to promote the activities of ASMR and the sector, reinforcing the value of health and medical research. The most recent media focus was around the AHMRC in November which attracted reasonable coverage including local and international stories. The next major activity is the Federal Budget followed by ASMR MRW®. ASMR's key messages will be pushed in the lead up to the Budget. There will be a strong focus on the ASMR Medalist and the strategic messages he will be promoting. We will also be covering abstracts from the various state scientific meetings in and around ASMR MRW®

Dr Phillips introduced Dr Brigid Lynch to report on the **Communications Portfolio**

Dr Lynch advised the portfolio has a focus on social media to compliment more traditional media forms. The reach in this space is growing with 1100 Twitter and 900 Facebook followers. Events during ASMR MRW® will be promoted through social media as will our advocacy for the sector.

Dr Phillips advised that, as part of both ASMR Medical Research Week® and our National Scientific Conference we will be running Career and Professional Development Workshops and provide networking events to foster collaboration.

In November last year, ASMR held its annual Indigenous Health Forum 'healthy start, strong family', which will form the basis of recommendations to Government in our continued efforts to bridge the gap in health outcomes for our indigenous community. This year Antonia Pritchard will be organising our IHF to be held in November.

Dr Phillips called on Dr Andrew Burgess to report on the **Newsletter Portfolio**

Dr Burgess advised that purpose of the Newsletter is to provide quality articles which give an insight into what is happening in the sector. We have an edition coming out in the next week or so which contains an interesting article from Warwick Anderson as the outgoing CEO of NHMRC. Dr Burgess invited input from affiliate member organisations on articles of interest.

In concluding, Dr Phillips asked all members to continue raising the profile of health and medical research and communicate the many examples of how medical research has made a difference, to Government. She advised that she would make herself available to any who would like to communicate any specific issues to raise with Government and key decision makers. Dr Phillips said, *"I am looking forward to a productive year, where I am hopeful that together we can make a positive difference for the sector and continue improving health outcomes for Australians"*.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 5:25pm