



30 May 2008

Committee Secretary
Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Innovation
PO Box 6021
House of Representatives
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600
AUSTRALIA

Dear Committee Secretary

Re: Inquiry into research training and research workforce issues in Australian universities

With responsibility for the training of 1500 post-graduate students across 36 independent not-for-profit organizations, the Association of Australian Medical Research Institutes (AAMRI) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the inquiry into research training and research workforce issues in Australian Universities.

AAMRI members are independent medical research institutes (MRIs) located across Australia. The MRIs are independent, not-for-profit and closely affiliated with the health sector and hospitals and higher education and universities. In addition to 1500 post-graduate students, the MRIs employ more than 6000 researchers and support staff. They have a combined research income of more than \$350 million per annum, winning most of that from competitive grant funding. About half of this is derived from the NHMRC, and a significant amount is awarded by international funding agencies.

AAMRI members carry out much of Australia's most distinguished and world-renowned health and medical research, in almost every aspect of human health and disease and are major partners in commercialisation of Australian biomedical discoveries.

While AAMRI recognises the contribution that Australian universities make to research training and education, MRIs also make a major contribution and train a significant number of students. Some 60% of NHMRC Fellows come out of medical research institutes and these are some of Australia's top researchers.

Australia is extremely competitive in medical research and attracting and retaining the best researchers is crucial to our ongoing success.

The following is an extract from the AAMRI submission to the Innovation Review 2008:

"There must be a focus on positioning Australia as a 'smart country'. This will need a robust and well-supported career path to build research capacity and attract and retain high-calibre researchers and intellectual capital in Australia. AAMRI supports the recommendations in the Walter & Eliza Hall Institute of Medical Research submission to the Innovation Review 2008 on education including initiatives to attract and retain the best possible science teachers at primary and secondary level and to encourage and support women in research careers.

A recent survey by the Australian Society for Medical Research (ASMR) showed significant dissatisfaction among the Australian health and medical research workforce. Of particular concern were employment insecurity and the lack of a career structure. As highlighted by the Telethon Institute for Child Health Research in its submission for the Innovation Review 2008, inadequate salary support has meant that some of their staff are moving into University or private sector positions in Australia or overseas. There is an increasing gap between the salary levels for staff in universities compared to MRIs. Research funding needs to be able to attract and retain the very best people in research and this will pave the way for greater innovation from health and medical research."

In the recommendations in this section we listed the following:

- **Career development schemes such as the NHMRC Research Fellowship and Practitioner programs are critical to providing a skilled and qualified health and medical research workforce to meet the national health challenges**
- **Elite schemes such as the Federation Fellowships and Australia Fellowships, designed to attract world leading researchers, and to recapture outstanding expatriate Australians must be retained**
- **The proposed development of a national mid-career support scheme (Future Fellowships) to support 1,000 of our nations best and brightest, and accessible to researchers, wherever they are based, is welcomed by AAMRI.**

The schemes need to be retained and expanded if we are to boost Australia's research workforce and keep pace with the demands in this area into the future.

There are some anomalies when it comes to funding for students. Although some MRIs are in consultation with the Universities regarding student funding there are still inconsistencies when it comes to reimbursement for student training at MRIs.

Career structure and workforce issues:

In the health arena, there is a deficiency in clinically trained professionals who also have a strong research background. This shortage in research clinicians for clinical translation is contrary to need for outcomes from investment in research.

Research clinicians interface basic biology and clinical practice to solve biomedical problems and spearhead biomedical research initiatives. As practitioners they are based in the health system and can identify needs to drive innovative solutions. Research clinicians are integral to the translation of developments within basic science and medical technology into applied clinical practice, ie. translation of laboratory-based findings into the clinic into evidence-based clinical research and community outcomes.

Clinical research depends not only upon appropriately skilled research clinicians but also the commitment and support of clinical institutions.

Despite the acknowledged contribution of clinical research to effective, evidence-based practice, and the need for clinical research to underpin improvements in the quality and safety of health services, clinical research is not necessarily recognised or valued as an essential component of clinical services.

The training times for specialist colleges are getting longer and there is little incentive on top of the financial disincentive for the candidates to add to this load and to take further time out to complete PhDs in research.

Recommendations:

- **Career support schemes for clinician researchers require development with remuneration commensurate with clinical activities**
- **Universities and Specialist Colleges need to collaborate to develop training programs that allow concurrent research and specialist training to shorten the duration for gaining specialist clinician/scientist credentials.**

Please feel free to contact Professor Garry Jennings AM, President of AAMRI or myself on 03 8532 1511 if you require any further information.

Yours sincerely,



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AAMRI