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HOWARD FLOREY INSTITUTE

Mr Raymond Knight
Senior Researcher
Standing Committee
Employment & Workplace Relations
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Mr Knight

Re: Public Hearing – Inquiry into pay equity and associated issues related to increasing female participation in the workforce

In recognition of the need to retain and attract female participation in the workforce, the Howard Florey Institute has implemented a number of positive work practices including:

- 20 weeks Paid Maternity Leave
- An all Institute approach to managing maternity leave costs
- Family Leave provisions
- Flexible work arrangements
- 48/52 working year
- Harassment & Discrimination Policies
- Professional Development Opportunities for female researchers

Despite these positive workplace initiatives there are a number of shortfalls in supporting female participation in the workforce across the broader scientific research sector. As outlined in my letter dated 25th August 2008, the female members of our research staff do not have pay equity issues as we have strict salary and classification guidelines. However, other issues impact on career progression of our female scientists. Success in research funding and career progression are both highly dependent on scientific output, and individual scientists are made to apply for and compete in the open market therefore, any interruptions in the career represent a significant setback.

A "Women in Science" group has been established at the Howard Florey Institute specifically to identify issues in the workplace which have an impact on the progression and scientific career development for female research scientists. The group has broad representation across all the levels of the organization which includes PhD students, research assistants, scientific research officers, senior research fellows and senior management. The figures at the Howard Florey Institute clearly show that there are increasing numbers of female research scientists entering the sector as PhD students with high representation at the research assistant, research officer and senior research officer levels. However this number reduces significantly at senior research fellow level and above.

The Women in Science group believe this is indicative of the scientific research sector as a whole and the group as such has written a letter to the National Health & Medical Research Council (NHMRC) making recommendations to change existing practices in an effort to improve working conditions for female researchers and offering options for career development and progression. (see appendix 1) Professor Geoffrey Donnan, Director of the Howard Florey Institute is fully supportive of the initiatives of the group and has made this part of his executive portfolio and has also written a letter of support to the NHMRC. (see appendix 2)

We welcome the opportunity to participate and contribute to the findings into your inquiry into pay equity and associated issues related to increasing female participation in the workforce.

Yours sincerely

Gary Gray
Chief Operating Officer



Dr Clive Morris
Chief Knowledge and Development Officer
National Health & Medical Research Council
GPO Box 1421
Canberra ACT 2601

24th Feb 2009

Dear Dr Morris,

RE: Suggestions for policy improvements to NHMRC schemes for people support

A Women in Science (WIS) Group has been established at the Howard Florey Institute to identify issues in the workplace which have impacted on the progression and/or the scientific career development and research outcomes for women researchers at the institute. The group would like to propose the following recommendations to amend existing NHMRC policies that would significantly improve working conditions for women researchers, offering options for career development and progression. We believe that these improvements would greatly assist in the retention of the best and brightest women researchers.

1. That NHMRC offer paid maternity (and paternity) leave at ALL levels of funding

- Currently available for early career/training fellowships (i.e. CJ Martin and Howard Florey Centenary Fellowships), but not at level of project grants when the CI funded on the grant takes maternity leave. Hence, parental leave is taken from grant funding period which leaves (predominantly female) researchers disadvantaged at the time of grant renewal.

2. Availability of part time fellowship at ALL levels.

- This option is currently available only to clinical fellows with highly productive outcomes. The introduction of part-time awards for the CJ Martin and Peter Doherty training fellowships, career development awards and research fellowships would provide better opportunities for women researchers with young children.

3. Introduction of new award to accommodate researchers returning from career interruption.

- Career interruptions (as a result of child bearing or rearing, chronic illness or sustained caring of dependent family member) for researchers represent a very significant set back and introduction of this new award will assist researchers in re-establishing their research careers.

4. Allocate a section in the funding applications to enable clear statement of scientific output relative to opportunity for consideration during the review process.

- At present, it is not clear how scientific output relative to opportunity is assessed for NHMRC applications. The introduction of a dedicated section on applications to allow clear statements on limitations in opportunity e.g. career interruptions and a transparent scoring system for reviewers to take this issue into consideration would be a significant advancement. For example, the NHMRC could allocate an extra point to applicants that have endured significant disruptions to their careers within the last 5 years, as is the case for New Investigators in the Project Grant scheme.

5. Provision of feedback for unsuccessful training fellowship and CDA applicants.

- Feedback is currently given to all successful as well as unsuccessful research and clinical fellowships but not to applicants of other people awards. It would be beneficial for the



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applicants to know whether they meet all the selection criteria and be provided with feedback on areas that require improvement.

Members of our group would welcome the opportunity to communicate further with regard to possible advances in NHMRC policy that may impact positively on gender balance at the SRF level and beyond. We look forward to a response from NHMRC

Yours Sincerely,

Siew Yeen Chai
Chair, WIS Group
NHMRC Senior Research Fellow
Howard Florey Institute

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Human Resource Manager
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Cc Prof Kerin O'Dea
NHMRC Research and Practitioner Fellowship Portfolio



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11 February, 2009

Dr Clive Morris
Chief Knowledge & Development Officer
National Health & Medical Research Council
GPO Box 1421
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Dear Dr Morris

I write to support the important initiative of our Women in Science group, chaired by Dr Siew-Yeen Chai, to suggest some sensible changes to the NHMRC funding structure. The objective of these changes is to introduce flexibility for women during their child bearing years. Currently the system does seem to favour only a full-time approach to employment which restricts the options of many women during a critical phase of their career development.

The problem is particularly prevalent at the Howard Florey Institute, with 60% junior researchers being female, but by the time senior positions are reached, the percentage drops to less than 10%.

It is somewhat surprising that initiatives have not already been introduced by the NHMRC, given that these changes were introduced to accommodate women in medicine, during their training and research years, almost ten years ago.

Perhaps even more importantly, we are denying Australian scientists career opportunities and depriving our nation of a critical intellectual resource.

I support this group's initiative unreservedly.

Yours sincerely

Geoffrey A Donnan MBBS, MD, FRACP, FRCP (Edin)
Director

Copy: Kieran O'Dea, Research and Practitioner Fellowships Portfolio, NHMRC

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