

# **AUSTRALIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES NATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR MEDICINE**

## **ANNUAL REPORT TO COUNCIL ON ACTIVITIES DURING 2008**

### **Meetings of the National Committee for Medicine**

The Membership of the National Committee for Medicine during 2008 was:

Professor David Allen, FAA, University of Sydney  
Professor Bruce Armstrong, FAA, University of Sydney  
Professor Jonathan Carapetis, Menzies Institute, Darwin  
Professor Bronwyn Kingwell, Baker Heart Research Institute, Melbourne  
Professor David Vaux, FAA, Latrobe University, Melbourne  
Professor Claire Wainwright, Royal Children's Hospital, Brisbane  
Professor Judith Whitworth, John Curtin Institute, Canberra  
Professor Bob Williamson, FAA, University of Melbourne, Chair  
Professor Sue Serjeantson, and then Dr Sue Meek, as Executive Director AAS, in attendance  
Ms Jeanette Mill and Ms Fenja Theden, in attendance

The National Committee met twice during 2008, on April 4<sup>th</sup> and on July 31<sup>st</sup>.

In 2009, meetings are proposed for March/April and for September/October.

### **International Activities**

The National Committee for Medicine is not involved with organisations affiliated to ICSU, as international organisations in the medical area are structured in a different way.

The Chair of the Committee continued to advise the Academy on international issues, to ensure that the Academy was appropriately represented at meetings in the Region and with AusAID when appropriate.

The Academy, through Professor Carapetis, has been involved in the IAMP priority area dealing with rheumatic fever, as this is a major health problem for indigenous Australians.

### **Activities of the National Committee for Medicine during 2008**

1. The National Committee for Medicine has attempted to influence policy with the new Australian Government. The NC Medicine is firmly of the opinion that research funding through the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) should continue to be channelled through the Department of Health. We have put this point of view to Government, in particular in discussions around the Cutler Report. We believe that the Academy should continue to argue for increases in research allocations to medical research, through the NHMRC as well as other mechanisms as appropriate.
2. Although the Committee put a case to The Hon Nicola Roxon MP, Minister for Health and Ageing, that there should be a dedicated funding stream for translational research, this matter was referred by Government to the Cutler Committee and the various committees dealing with health funding. While many of our proposals lapsed because of the financial situation, we are pleased that the Government has been able to fund a large increase in the number of post-doctoral and post-graduate awards, which will solve some of the resource issues at more junior levels. However, we note there is still a lack of strategy for dealing with the expectations of those in medical research, who hope for a vision for the whole system that is sustainable and has career options.

3. The Committee helped to organise a mentoring and skills workshop for early career researchers at the Academy in February 2008, and has been raising the outcomes from this workshop both within the Academy and with NHMRC, ARC and CSIRO.
4. We note with satisfaction that the argument of the Committee, and the Academy, that the CRC conditions be modified so that community benefit is considered, has been agreed by Government.
5. The Committee has continued to have a close relationship with the NHMRC, and with its CEO, Professor Warwick Anderson, who attended the July meeting. Many of the points that were made concerning funding, mentoring, misconduct, and the relationship between NHMRC and other Government agencies were acted upon by Professor Anderson, whose attention to detail is impressive.
6. The final revised version of the NHMRC/ARC Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research that was issued in 2007 continued to be considered by the Committee during 2008. Professor David Vaux FAA, on behalf of the Committee, made a series of recommendations to the NHMRC and ARC that would provide both guidance and an oversight/appeals procedure when misconduct is alleged. We still argue that a national framework is needed to deal with more serious cases of misconduct, and will continue to raise this with the CEO of the NHMRC.
7. The Committee notes with pleasure that AusAID, through its principal medical advisor, Dr Jim Tulloch, has delivered on its commitment to international medical research programmes in our region.
8. The Committee prepared notes for Council to assist with submissions concerning research through the Ministry of Defence (Defence Science and Technology Organisation), concerning NCRIS mapping of strategic infrastructure, and the Senate Inquiry into Academic Freedom.

At the July 2008 meeting of the Committee, Bob Williamson and Judith Whitworth retired, and a number of names were put forward to ExCom as possible replacements.

Bob Williamson, 23/12/2008