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Dean

Sydney Medical School researchers won \$74 million in NHMRC fellowships and grants for 2012, and the University of Sydney received more NHMRC funding than any other research institution in Australia. This reflects the commitment of staff to excellence, and is evidence of the quality of work carried out in this School.

RESEARCH EXCELLENCE

What distinguishes the great medical schools of the world is the excellence of their research. Improvements in healthcare flow directly from research and medical schools without a strong research base, in my view, lack a fundamental component of good medical education. Good medical schools provide students with an opportunity to engage with inspiring clinicians, academics and researchers, and to develop the skills which will equip them to participate in generating the new knowledge on which the future of healthcare is based.

We are fortunate here to have a strong research base. Sydney Medical School, with its schools, disciplines, centres and affiliated research institutes, accounts for nearly half of the University's research income. The quality is high and we fare well on every competitive measure – including NHMRC grants, international ratings, citations by other researchers, and the positive feedback from colleagues internationally about our research programs and our young graduates.

But, as we all recognise, we live in a competitive environment. We compete to attract and retain the best staff and students, for research funding, and to provide the best facilities and research tools. There is no room for complacency and it is essential that we continue to review our research effort.

But what are the ingredients for "research excellence" and what are we doing to fine tune our efforts to move us up a gear?

The first essential is to have the best staff. We need people with outstanding track records and potential, and then to pay them competitively. Research is underfunded in Australia, which presents a perennial challenge of securing additional funds from other sources, including teaching and philanthropic donations.

The contribution our teaching staff make to our research is not widely appreciated, but revenue

generated through teaching fills holes created in the current research funding arrangements.

Philanthropic donations have been rising, and one such example is a recent large donation by the Petre family for prostate cancer research. Some of our patients value and are keen to support our work and recognise the inextricable link between research and the care they receive. But we also need to continue to apply pressure on government for proper funding of research.

The best researchers attract the best students. This year, we have over 900 PhD students in Sydney Medical School. They have chosen this University because of the quality of our supervisors and exciting projects available to them. We need to continue to attract motivated students and to provide opportunities for them, before national and international competitors do!

The second important facilitator of research productivity is the built environment, equipment and opportunity for researchers to interact and leverage one another's work. The University is using its resources to create and improve the environment for our researchers. On campus, construction of the new Centre for Obesity Diabetes Cardiovascular Disease is underway, and when complete in 2014 will provide state of the art facilities. Off the main campus, the new Kolling and ANZAC facilities have been greatly beneficial but more is needed at Westmead and in the next 5-10 years at Nepean.

Our affiliate institutes, often built and sustained by the drive of individuals, also provide an invaluable resource for this university's research efforts.

Already, our decision two years ago to focus efforts around six major research themes, is providing benefits. It has brought researchers with similar interests together to generate new research goals and projects. This is critical for immediate productivity gains which new buildings will not deliver for several years.