

Remarks for Opening of Stage II of the Brain and Mind Research Institute, University of Sydney

5 June 2006

If you were to ask what was the largest and most expensive civil construction work in the Southern Hemisphere in the 19th century, the answer would be surprising. It was the asylum at Gladesville and at Rozelle – the same beautiful stone buildings overlooking the Parramatta River where *Cosi* was filmed and, restored, now house our College of the Arts. That says much of the enlightened attitude of governments in Australia in the Victorian era; of their practical concern for those crazed and benighted souls who would otherwise wander the streets. That it was protective of others in society is true: but it was also caring of them according to the not unenlightened standards of the time.

That same spirit has inspired the Howard Government in its support of our multi-disciplinary research. But with a difference – we want to make positive changes in afflicted lives, not just deal with a salvage operation. Thanks to Ministers Abbott, Nelson and Julie Bishop and their Departments, we have received \$9 million over the past 12 months.

We do not, like Harvard, have researchers working solely on Alzheimer's numbered in the hundreds – though we have a whole floor of researchers devoted to dementia including Alzheimer's, under Professor Juergen Goetz from Switzerland. Moreover we maintain close links with leading researchers across the globe like our young alumnus Dr Vikram Khurana, with a fellowship from the American Australian Association, who is returning from Harvard to join our Institute to play a vital role in our next stage. Adapting his memorable words from a talk he gave to our alumni in New York, he is "a fruit fly who flew home" from that Australian diaspora of enormous talent.

What we deliberately set out to create is a unique multidisciplinary research environment, housed under one roof, yet drawing on the resources of a great University.

Max Bennett's own work, and the spirit that pervades this Institute, is humanistic at its core. It is captured in that essential duality of 'Brain and Mind', but even more fundamentally in Max's words¹:

"A person is not identical with his mind".

And,

"It is not the mind that thinks and reasons, wants things and has purpose, forms intentions and makes decisions, acts voluntarily or intentionally. It is the [whole] human being."

So the Institute brings together neurology and psychiatry, psychology and basic neuroscience. And covers the whole gamut of brain and mind diseases – including dementia, clinical depression, multiple sclerosis, psychoses and pain; and most importantly that scourge, especially of the young, substance abuse.

For most lawyers, mental illness comes packaged in the recipe-like diagnostic categories of DSM IV², the American Bible of psychiatry. Then there is the legal definition of insanity – did not know the nature or quality of one's act, or did not know it was wrong. The Prime

¹ MR Bennett and PMS Hacleer, *Philosophical Foundations of Neuroscience*, at p 63. A striking example of this is Schumann's bi-polar condition. Did it contribute, even cause, the wild passion of his piano music, or was he simply embracing an external influence, the romantic movement in its 'sturm und drang'? Or are both true?

² American Psychiatric Associations' Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders 4th edition

Minister will recall our law lecturer describing the murderer who thought his wife was a fried egg. And the law did come to recognize nervous shock; the High Court recently abandoning the illusory notion of 'normal fortitude' as a bar to recovery. However it retains a degree of scepticism about recovered memory.

But to bring all this to the personal and the human, epitomised by those extraordinary accounts by Oliver Sacks, based on his patients' case histories. Which of us have not related to a child or grandchild in that instinctual empathy denied to an autistic child. Or, remembering Professor Hickie's work on depression, experience depression in a friend miraculously lifting, through recent break-throughs in medication and greater understanding of its syndrome. For me, one of the saddest stories was Anne Deveson's account of her troubled son struggling with schizophrenia.

The links between these diseases are being slowly revealed. Uncertain as we still are of their relationships, we do know that breakthroughs can come from multiple directions, not easy to predict. Max and his team have created an Institute covering holistically the whole range of animal research, translating this to the treatment of human diseases of brain and mind. And at a clinical level, pursuing the optimum means of effective intervention alongside outreach to the community.

This has meant that programs such as our Youth Mental Health program are housed together in this complex of buildings. So do we optimize the impact of our research, delivering our findings for the well-being of all Australians. And in turn, the Institute has had extraordinary devotion from the community - Oliver Richter, the Gonski family, Ken Parker, Kerry and Ryan Stokes, and so many more, here today or otherwise recognised.

Prime Minister, the Brain and Mind Research Institute is now, because of the support of your Government, at the beginning of a great period of expansion which will see in time major discoveries, break-throughs that will underpin relief from suffering of so many of our fellow citizens. Perhaps even a Nobel Prize within 15 years. We are grateful for the vital support your Government has given us. The University of Sydney and the Institute pledge that, with continued backing, even more can be achieved. In a profound sense, our work responds to Macbeth's anguished plea: "canst thou not minister to a mind diseased"³.

GFK Santow
Chancellor

Macbeth, Act 5, Canst thou not minister to a mind diseased,
Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow,
Raze out the written troubles of the brain
And with some sweet oblivious antidote
Cleanse the stuff'd bosom of that perilous stuff
Which weighs upon the heart?