

## **Submission 168 — Florey Neuroscience Institutes, Stroke Division**

I have contributed to a number of submissions relating to the manner in which we support scientists and researchers in Australia.

In this submission I wish to address the issue of the growing international focus of research efforts which I see as a major change in the Australian landscape since the last review.

Australian researchers are now part of global efforts that span the development of new technologies to support research, examination of worldwide disease trends, development of databanks and the conduct of clinical trials of drugs, devices or complex non-interventions. In some of our populations under study, particularly those with less common but disabling disease states, the only way in which we can advance science is to work cooperatively with colleagues in other parts of the world to ensure that sufficient numbers of patients can be recruited in a time efficient manner. Even in trials of common diseases such as my own area - stroke - international cooperation in clinical trials is highly desirable if not essential.

This raises the important issue of funding of international research efforts. It is without doubt difficult to acquire funding to support international, investigator driven trials that have been developed and are managed in Australia. Yet the NHMRC criteria fully support "internationally competitive" competitive research. Internationally competitive research is not necessarily conducted however on a global scale.

While there are examples of Australian driven trials, conducted internationally that have received NHMRC funding, these are very few, and need to be reviewed in panels that understand the importance of global studies. Recently I was advised by an eminent Australian scientist that "there is a bias against research conducted outside of Australia" and that I should de-emphasise the international nature of my research. This is an important observation and aligns with the views of others in the field. Given the increasingly common approach of developing strong research partnerships across countries at the researcher level, and the increasing numbers of clinical trials and other studies that recruit globally, we need to consider how we might address this issue of funding studies where a significant proportion of the monies may be required to go off shore. Some solutions to the problem of funding these studies are as follows:

1. At a local level I think we need to review current policy from major funding sources such as the NHMRC and, if we wish to encourage Australian scientists to lead on the international stage, explicitly write policy that supports funding for International trials, train panel members in the policy to help remove the personal bias that currently appears to exist ("its Australian money it should be spent in Australia") and consider review of these studies in a separate panel.

2. Further develop links with international funding agencies so that cooperative grants are available as sources for funding of these studies. While the NHMRC does have relationships with a number of organizations, this is still exceedingly small and we need to increase these.

3. We need a flexible system that can respond to opportunities as they arise. To give a current example from my group, I recently submitted an expression of interest for a grant to the UK National Institute for Health Research for GBP 600,000 to fund the UK arm of an international trial of early rehabilitation for people with stroke. The CEO of this organization wanted to talk about co-funding with the NHMRC or other organization to fully fund the project. Calls to the NHMRC found that there was no mechanism by which such an opportunity could be further explored for this trial. This lack of flexibility to pursue golden opportunities for international funding is a significant problem and one that could surely be overcome. We just need a mechanism to make it happen.