

Submission 18: Bellberry Limited

A Philanthropic Model for Increasing Funding of Medical Research in Australia

Bellberry Limited is a private not for profit Australian company. The Company formed in 2004 following the recognition of a need for a Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) to service the valuable research being conducted in the private sector.

Investigators from private rooms, private hospitals who do not have their own HREC, research institutions, collaborative groups and GP groups amongst others, utilise the services of Bellberry HREC's. The bulk of our work is the review of Company Sponsored clinical drug or device trials.

There are around 250 HRECs registered with the NHMRC and much has been done recently to streamline the processes of review for Multi centre trials e.g. the NHMRC National Approach and the mutual recognition scheme being addressed by the eastern states. Bellberry has been conducting multi-centre trial review since 2005 but only for the private sector.

Being a standalone company we are able to quantify the costs associated with the provision of HRECs. Providing HRECs is a costly business. Bellberry also commissioned Access Economics in 2007 to undertake a cost benefit analysis – public versus private HRECs. Despite the analysis showing little difference between the sectors used it did highlight the average cost of a members' time per year as \$37,000 (for an HREC with a scientific subcommittee). The report concluded that substantial savings could be made within the health sector if mutual recognition for review of clinical trials was adopted on a wide scale i.e. the net benefit could be \$35.6m over ten years. This figure would of course be far greater in 2012.

Bellberry's not for profit status is an important aspect of our company model as at the end of each operating year we donate any surplus funds to our operational needs back into the Australian research community. Indeed to date we have donated over \$2.5m in the community. These funds have been directed to the University sector aimed at reaching high calibre researchers who just missed out on receiving an NHMRC/ARC grant and/or to support PhD students or scholarships.

The service Bellberry provides is of high quality and provides a rapid turnaround of responses to investigators. With the NHMRC having clarified governance processes as separate to HREC functions (Research Governance Handbook: Guidance for the national approach to single ethical review December 2011) the adoption of the Bellberry model for clinical trials review across Australia would not only improve services to researchers but should reduce the numbers of HRECs being funded by the public sector, free up committee members to attend to their position functions and increase the philanthropic pool of donations to support further research.