

Looking forward

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The Faculty of Medicine at the University of Sydney has achieved much over its history. We are now bigger, better resourced and better positioned to accelerate our achievements than at any point in our long history. Research income and research publications are growing at more than 20% per annum, we are recruiting international research high-flyers to our staff in unprecedented numbers and we are recognised as a top league Faculty internationally.

What then of the future? I can predict with absolute certainty our growth will continue, sometimes faster sometimes slower, but always exceeding that of the Australian higher education sector in general and certainly faster than the Australian average for medical faculties. We will achieve more firsts from our large and growing

team of researchers. We will discover whole new areas of endeavour and will continue to do it in the 'Sydney way' with excitement accompanied by understatement.

Can we predict where the advances will be? No, for that is the stuff of enquiry and research. Many industries seek to manage their way to innovation. Too often they fail, for innovation and ideas come from individual curiosity and the willingness to take risks, bet on theories and ask the difficult questions. These traits do not sit easily with a well-controlled corporatised environment; so we in the university sector must preserve the spirit of academic inquiry.

Yet in a modern society when medical and health research requires multi-disciplinary research, large teams and expensive equipment, we can no longer expect society to trust its money to our hunches alone. We require good governance procedures, well thought-through strategies and effective coordination of individual efforts. The challenge for the Faculty is to balance individual curiosity-driven research with larger coordinated programmatic research efforts. Both require investment in skilled researchers and both require considerable vision and effort.

As we survey the Faculty in our 150th year I am confident we have both in very good measure, and we have that extra ingredient: a hunger to do more. From our initiatives in partnership with the George Institute of International Health to help establish a primary health care network in rural Andhra Pradesh in India to the work of Bruce Robinson and colleagues in the Hoc Mai Foundation in Vietnam, from the public health initiatives of Steve Leeder in addressing the threatening epidemic of cardiovascular disease in the developing world to the mega trials of Tony Keech and Steve MacMahon, from the fundamental science of Max Bennett, to the gene therapy and stem cell visions of John Rasko, and from the infectious disease insights of Tony Cunningham, Tania Sorrell and Warwick Britton we are making major steps forward across many branches of health and medical research.

We have a duty to Australia, to the whole Asia-Pacific region and to our local communities to do our best; we have a particular responsibility to work on solutions for the crippling burden of preventable disease in our Indigenous populations, and it is to these challenges that I see the Faculty rising.

We are developing new technologies in teaching and learning, demonstrating to the world how we can become more effective teacher trainers for the next generation of medicos for our own region and the world. We are rapidly establishing a reputation for world-class medical educational developments and research, along with a level of service commitment to the growing number of international universities who model their curricula on ours or who use our resources and delivery systems to teach their students on a daily basis.

Every minute, every day of every year a student somewhere in the world will log on to one of the Faculty's servers to get cases, learning materials and online support. Every minute of every day staff, students and alumni of the Faculty serve patients, helping to find cures, develop preventive strategies, treat symptoms or break bad news in a sympathetic and professional manner. Every day we face new challenges, but every day we rise to them and in doing so become stronger. For the Faculty and alumni who will gather together in 2056 to celebrate 200 years we wish you well, confident that your achievements will be beyond even our lofty dreams.

