



Message from the Executive Director

June 15 2008 marks one year since NICM was launched by the Commonwealth Minister for Health and Ageing, reflecting the significance of complementary medicine in Australia, and the need for a national and coordinated approach to research to build the evidence base and realise its potential to address health and disease.

I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge our foundation partners. NICM receives funding support from the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing and the NSW Office for Science and Medical Research and is hosted by the University of Western Sydney.

I would also like to acknowledge people from around the country who have supported us and helped get NICM off the ground. This includes the members of the Interim Advisory Panel, the Consultative Team, the researchers, practitioners and industry members who attended the national forums and the many individuals and organisations who have approached us with opportunities and proposals for collaboration.

It has been an exciting year, culminating in the development of research priorities and announcement of three national collaborative centres. The collaborative centre model is designed to create cross-institutional partnerships and links with industry and clinicians and to strengthen the depth of complementary medicine research capabilities in Australia. The concurrent announcement of NHMRC recipients of the CAM grants initiative meant over \$7 million has been committed by Government alone to the sector this year.

In addition to supporting the establishment of the Centres, in the coming year we will be seeking to strengthen broader networks and develop a number of directions papers on critical issues affecting research activity and investment. More broadly, there are a number of national review and reform initiatives relevant to the complementary medicine research sector, including the establishment of the Health and Hospitals Reform Commission, the National Innovation Review and the review of the Cooperative Research Centre Program. Information about these and

other initiatives will be made available on the NICM website which is currently being redeveloped.

A welcome development in the last month was the update of the Australian Society for Medical Research commissioned report by Access Economics *Exceptional Returns, The Value of Investing in Health R&D in Australia*. Released as part of ASMR Medical Research Week, the report provides compelling evidence of the health and economic returns from supporting medical research.

Over the next few months we will be conducting interstate visits to meet with industry, researchers and government agencies to discuss their priorities, our program and how we can work together.

Alan Bensoussan
Executive Director

NICM Collaborative Centres



Prof Con Stough, Prof Alan Bensoussan, Senator Jan McLucas, Prof Basil Roufagalas and Assoc Prof Luis Vitetta at the 3rd International Congress for Complementary Medicine Research (ICCMR) in Sydney.

Congratulations to the following successful NICM Collaborative Centres:

- Collaborative Centre for Traditional Chinese Medicine
- Collaborative Centre for Transitional Preclinical and Clinical Research in Nutraceuticals and Herbal Medicine
- Collaborative Centre for the Study of Natural Medicines and Neurocognition

Further information on the Collaborative Centres is available on the NICM website and regular updates will be available as part of the website redevelopment.

Governance

NICM is in the process of transitioning from interim arrangements to permanent Board and Scientific Advisory Committee structures.

Our thanks to the following people who made an invaluable contribution to NICM during its first year of operation:

Interim Advisory Panel

- Dr Col Gellatly (Chair)
- Professor David Briggs
- Ms Julie Hamblin
- Mr Tony Lewis
- Ms Ruth Trickey

Consultative Team

- Professor Marc Cohen
- Professor Stephen Myers
- Professor Basil Roufagalas

Major Projects 2008–09

In the coming year, NICM will be establishing a number of short-term working groups to support key projects.

These include:

- Analysis of the economic returns of complementary medicine research;
- Identifying options to enhance research investment by industry and other stakeholders, including a focus on the role of IP protection and market exclusivity measures;
- Mapping national and international examples and models of integrated care (complementary and mainstream western medicine). This will inform options and tools needed to support

pilots of integrated healthcare that will enable comparisons of efficacy, health outcomes and cost-benefits to be undertaken; and

- Continuing work with national and international partners on information sourcing and dissemination strategies to improve access to reliable sources of information about complementary medicine and ensure the quality of material that is developed, used by or linked to NICM.

Information about these and other initiatives will be made available on the NICM website as work progresses.

NHMRC - CAM Grants

The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) has announced \$5.3 million in grants to fund 13 projects aimed at research that will generate evidence and increase knowledge in the area of complementary and alternative medicine.

These grants fall under the NHMRC's strategic awards which supports health and medical research in areas which have been identified as a priority and where there is an unmet need for

targeted funding. Strategic awards address priorities identified by the NHMRC as part of its triennial strategic planning process as well as those identified by the Australian Government under its National Research Priorities.

NICM extends congratulations to all award recipients. A full list of the successful NHMRC Complementary and Alternative medicine grants is available at www.nicm.edu.au under the activities tab.

Health and Hospitals Reform Commission

Earlier this year the Prime Minister and the Minister for Health and Ageing announced the establishment of the National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission. The Commission is responsible for developing a long-term health reform plan for the Commonwealth Government.

In April 2008, the Commission called for submissions from the public, frontline health workers, professional and consumer groups, and other interested people and organisations to help inform its plan.

The establishment of the commission provides a significant opportunity to

present the strengths of evidence based complementary medicine and the growing capacity of the complementary medicine research sector to help address Australia's health care challenges.

NICM has made a series of recommendations in a submission to the Review, emphasising the potential of complementary medicine to address the burden of disease, particularly chronic disease. These include:

- Significantly increase the quantum and rigour of complementary medicine research effort;
- Facilitate partnerships between

CM around the Globe

Get Well UK

BBC News in the UK recently ran a documentary on a pilot scheme called Get Well Northern Ireland, a government initiative that allowed GP's to refer patients to complementary therapists with the NHS paying for their treatment.

The scheme which started in February 2007 focussed on two areas within selected GP practices, musculoskeletal problems and depression, stress and anxiety. Over 700 patients received complementary therapies ranging from acupuncture to osteopathy through the Northern Ireland project.

The Get Well Scheme ended in March 2008 and is currently being assessed by the Northern Ireland Health Minister.

<http://www.getwelluk.com/>

Only in America

The Anschutz Foundation has donated \$15 million to build a Health and Wellness Center at the University of Colorado Denver's Anschutz Medical Campus in Aurora.

The Health and Wellness Center will house CU Denver's existing Center for Human Nutrition as well as its Center for Integrative Medicine and the Center for Women's Health Research.

The centers' research facilities will focus on alternative medicine, holistic wellness and counselling, weight management, and improving nutrition and physical fitness.

<http://www.uchsc.edu/>

complementary and mainstream health and medical research (basic and clinical) and practice;

- Create pathways for clinical trials of complementary medicine to advance knowledge of safety, efficacy, general health outcomes and cost effectiveness; and
- Enable standardised evaluations to be undertaken of the role and value of complementary medicine interventions in multidisciplinary teams and clinics in both in-patient and out-patient settings.

The full submission is available on the website www.nicm.edu.au under the activities tab.



Researcher Profile: Professor Andrew Scholey

Professor of Behavioural and Brain Sciences
Head of Herbal and Nutritional Medicine Unit, Brain Sciences Institute, Swinburne University.

1. What is the present focus of your research?

Nutrition, nutraceuticals and cognition enhancement. Specifically using state-of-the-art science, including neurocognitive assessment, brain imaging and various physiological analyses to disentangle the neurocognitive effects of specific nutritional interventions (focussing on plant extracts). We hope to identify, understand the mechanisms and apply natural medicines as safe treatments for conditions where cognition becomes fragile, including ageing and dementia.

2. Most exciting scientific breakthrough?

I've been lucky enough to be involved in various trials where herbal extracts were assessed for the first time in humans for cognitive properties. Discovering and replicating positive neurocognitive effects from extracts of sage, ginseng and lemon balm was really exciting as was identifying some underlying mechanisms (including pro-cholinergic and gluco-regulatory effects). Some of the studies using more esoteric

interventions like oxygen administration and chewing gum are also really stimulating.

3. What is the biggest challenge in your area of research?

A few years ago I would have said being taken seriously! However the rigour of science in herbal medicine (and certain other aspects of complementary medicine) means that papers describing well-controlled studies are now regularly published in more mainstream journals. However we still need to persuade funding agencies that large nutra trials for cognitive decline in ageing and dementia are necessary – the potential benefits are huge. At a theoretical level the synergistic and polypharmacological properties of herbal constituents need to be properly understood in relation to neurocognitive function. On a more pragmatic level, this includes adequate standardisation and replication – the effects of any substance on behaviour can be fragile and this is even more so when using herbal extracts where the balance of components is important.

4. What other roles have you had during your career?

I was the director of the Human Cognitive Neuroscience Unit in the UK for a decade before coming to Australia

in late 2007. I was also co-director of the Medicinal Plant Research Centre in the UK (and remain as honorary director of their neurocognitive trials section). I've served on and reported to various scientific panels including as an expert witness to the UK Parliamentary Food and Health forum inquiry into diet and behaviour.

5. What are you passionate about (outside the lab)?

I have an eight-year-old daughter who keeps me on my toes outside the lab! I also love music, play the guitar and am currently really enjoying exploring the delights of Melbourne.

Andrew Scholey is Co-Director of the NICM Collaborative Centre for the Study of Natural Medicines and Neurocognition



International Appointment

Congratulations to Professor George Lewith who has been appointed Chair of Complementary Medicine at Southampton University in the UK.

Professor Lewith is an honorary consultant at Southampton Hospital, and was the first doctor in complementary medicine in England to receive Specialist Training Authority accreditation as a Complementary Medical Physician.

Employment Opportunities

Looking to fill a Post Doctoral or PhD Scholarship position with a skilled complementary medicine researcher?

Let us know and we will advertise the role on the NICM website.

Please contact Dimity Pinto NICM's Media and Information Officer with details of the type role and expertise required. Email — d.pinto@uws.edu.au

For further information please contact:

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Foundation partners:

NICM is an Australian Government initiative, supported by the NSW Government and hosted by the University of Western Sydney

