

2015 ASSCR Election

In accordance with the ASSCR Rules, nominations are open for the following ASSCR Committee positions:

- Secretary
- Treasurer
- Ordinary Committee member: Sponsorship/Industry subcommittee Chair
- Ordinary Committee member: Membership/Communications subcommittee Chair

Each position has a 2-year term. Nominees can nominate themselves, but all nominations need to be seconded by another fully-paid ASSCR member.

The timetable for the election process is as follows:

1. Monday 7th Sept: Nominations open
2. Friday 2nd Oct: Nominations close
3. Monday 12th Oct: Electronic voting to start
4. Friday 30th Oct: Electronic voting to end
5. Friday 6th Nov: Vote counting completed
6. Tuesday 10th Nov: Results announced at AGM held at the Annual Conference
7. Tuesday 10th Nov post-AGM: Newly elected Committee members take over their positions

Nomination forms and further details are available at www.asscr.org.

The Advent of State-Based ASSCR Public/Professional Events

In an expansion over and above our research-oriented Annual Meeting, Margret Schuller and the ASSCR Sponsorship Subcommittee have organised two highly successful Hot Topic Q&A events held at Genea's main operations in Sydney.

This is the first time the ASSCR has run additional meetings outside our annual conference. It is an important part of our outreach program to raise awareness of the ASSCR and its work, increase membership, and engage highly diverse audiences.

Both events attracted those interested in stem-cell research (including many young researchers), as well as people with industry, clinical, regulatory, sales and science communication experience.

Both events were free to attend and were highly successful; the events were:

- 1) *Stakeholders' perspective on autologous stem cell therapy regulation* (Wednesday, 1 July, 2015, 6–8 pm; refreshments provided by Eppendorf and Miltenyi Biotec)

Panel members: Prof. Stephanie Watson (Clinician and Researcher), Dr Russel Vickers (Clinician), Prof. Richard Harvey (Researcher), Prof. Bernie Tuch (Clinician and Researcher), and Dr Peter Harman (15 years' experience working with the TGA on regulation of the In-Vitro Diagnostics industry).

This event attracted 80 participants and was timely given the TGA's consultation process on potential changes to regulation in this sector. Freelance science writer and broadcaster Leigh Dayton subsequently summarised the evening's discussion with Tony Delroy on the local ABC radio science show. The ASSCR formally submitted its views to the TGA on 3rd March 2015.

- 2) *Australian stem cell industry business model* (Tuesday, 1 September, 2015, 6–8 pm; refreshments provided by In Vitro Diagnostics and ThermoFisher (Life Technologies)).

Panel members: Chair – Dr James Chong (Westmead Millennium Institute), Prof. Alan Trounson (Emeritus Professor Monash University), A/Prof. Jeremy Crook (ARC Centre of Excellence in Electromaterials Science, University of Wollongong), Dr Tim Oldham (CEO, Cell Therapies Pty Ltd), Dr Julian Chick (COO, Admedus Ltd), John Martin (CEO, Regeneus Ltd), Tomas Stojanov (CEO, Genea), Karen Dado (Business Development Adviser for Entrepreneurs' Programme, Accelerating)

This event attracted 50 participants and lively discussion ensued focussing on:

- How to strengthen relationships between private industry and universities in order to foster innovation.
- How to reverse the trend of stem-cell and related companies leaving Australia to relocate overseas.
- Establishing a national business plan for the stem-cell industry, which includes helping to guide legislation and regulation, and improve funding.

Transcripts of both meeting are available from Margret Schuller (mschuller@peprotehasia.com).

2015 Theo Murphy Think Tank
The stem cell revolution – lessons and imperatives for Australia
22-24 July, Menzies Hotel, Sydney

The Australian Academy of Science held a Theo Murphy Think Tank event to investigate how Australia can take best advantage of the emerging international revolution in stem cells and regenerative medicine.

The aim of the Theo Murphy High Flyers Think Tank events are to bring together early- and mid-career researchers from a broad range of relevant disciplines to:

- Engage in thinking about novel applications of existing science (including social science) and technology to issues of national significance
- Identify issues and gaps in current knowledge, and
- Propose solutions.

As noted by the Australian Academy of Science: “While stem cell therapy has been part of medical practice for decades in the form of bone marrow transplantation and other treatments, recent developments have led to a revolution in biology and medicine that has not yet peaked. These scientific advances are being played out against a background controversy where many fear that science quality, the rationale for clinical trials, and patient safety are being compromised by the rapid pace of the field and also the rapid proliferation of unproven and often unethical therapies that foster an industry of stem cell tourism.”

The Think Tank participants aimed to identify creative solutions to these issues and consider policy options that could address them. Discussions were organised around the following themes:

Group 1. Future Directions for Australian Stem Cell Science (Chair: Prof Patrick Tam; Rapporteurs: Drs Agnieszka Arthur and Kathryn Davidson)

Group 2. Facilitating Basic and Applied Research (Chair: Prof Martin Pera; Rapporteurs: A/Prof Jody Haigh and Dr Elizabeth Ng)

Group 3. Public Expectations and Regulatory Oversight (Chair: A/Prof Megan Munsie; Rapporteurs: Drs Tamra Lysaght and Michael O’Connor)

Group 4. Facilitating Clinical Translation (Chair: Dr James Chong; Rapporteurs: Profs Andrew Boyle and Iona Novak)

The event was held at the Menzies Hotel in Sydney, and included keynote presentations from leading national and international stem cell experts. A report containing recommendations developed throughout the course of the event is being compiled and will soon be launched as a blueprint for ensuring the health of the stem cell and regenerative medicine sector in Australia.

Australia at ISSCR 2015 in Stockholm: One Researcher's Perspective By Dr Heather Main

ISSCR, the biggest stem cell meeting of the year, still stressful to a 'young girl' fighting against making the decision in concurrent sessions. In summarising ISSCR 2015 I would start to say sorry to the poor people who did not have time to see the beautiful city of Stockholm and only saw the convention centre suburb of Älvsjö....worst impression of what I would say is one of the most beautiful cities in Europe....also the most ridiculous word for non-Scandinavians to pronounce....try elfwer....

However, on the bright side the meeting was well attended with over 3500 registrants and at least one Nobel Prize winner, who was spotted visiting the Nobel museum in the cities old town to sign the visitors book. While I have summarised some of the talks in a few blogs on Paul Knoepfler's site, I thought I would take this opportunity to discuss how Australia was attending ISSCR 2015. With 16,000km under our belt (it is arguably only the New Zealanders who travelled further to attend), Aussie's were in full force giving talks, presenting posters and manning booths to promote Australia's stem cell industry....the grapevine says 78 Aussie's in total!

The University of Queensland was punching above its weight with two speakers, Dr Deanne Whitworth and Associate Professor Christine Wells. Deanne was discussing the evolution of mammalian pluripotency by comparing to the derivation of induced pluripotent stem cells in our dear and fascinating Australian monotreme, the platypus. Christine was presenting a topic dear to the heart of many, the molecular classification of mesenchymal stem cells. This issue is central to the debate on MSC derived cellular therapies and the associated unregulated, unproven cell therapy industry that is flourishing in Australia.

The last Aussie based speaker was Dr Sara Howden (MCRI) discussing her innovations in the field of simultaneous reprogramming and gene correction in patient fibroblasts. It's great to see Aussie research getting out to the world and to see our Aussies getting the job done.

We should not forget however that, being a small population, Australia has some issues in keeping our intellect on shore and some of our top stem cell scientists are based overseas. Talks given by Aussies abroad include the plenary talk by Dr Allan Robins (Viacyte) discussing their ground-breaking research into encapsulated embryonic stem cell therapies for diabetes and a talk by my Karolinska Institutet buddy Nigel Kee (another queenslander), who presented his PhD work on the relationship between dopaminergic neurons and subthalamic nucleus neuronal lineages, as assessed by single cell RNA sequencing.

Other Aussie highlights at the meeting were:

- Professor Alan Trounson receiving the ISSCR public service award
- Associate Professor Megan Munsie presenting the ISSCR Closer Looks website and participating in a taskforce to draft Guidelines on Clinical Translation
- Professor Martin Pera assuming the role as Clerk for ISSCR
- Andrew Elefanty (chair of ISSCR's International Affairs Committee) chaired a meeting of stem cell networks from across the globe... (with Michael O'Connor representing ASSCR)

Also, it must be noted that Australian based company Genea Biocells were not only memorable for their booth on world leading human embryonic stem cell based disease modeling but for their much appreciated 'stubby holders' which kept the beer cold and beer holding hands of delegates cosy for poster perusal.

Australia is home to some of the best researchers and most innovative companies in the world. While 3 Aussie based speakers looks pretty dire compared to 78 US based speakers, us Aussies should hold our heads high as, with just a little mathematics, based on population size, Australia ranked #11 in speaker representation, on the heels of the UK and Germany.

I hope this little summary has brought you some pride for our Aussie stem cell representatives (and I apologise and would love to hear from those we missed!), and we hope to see you at ISSCR 2016 in San Francisco!