MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE AUSTRALIAN SOCIETY FOR MEDICAL RESEARCH AND REPRESENTATIVES OF AFFILIATE MEMBER COLLEGES, HELD AT THE GRAND CHIFLEY HOTEL, ADELAIDE ON WEDNESDAY MARCH 9, 2011

Present (ASMR): Dr Emma Parkinson-Lawrence, Dr Paul Dawson, Dr Kristen Nowak, Dr Nik Zeps, A/Prof Naomi Rogers, Dr Rosemary Keogh, Dr Roger Yazbek, Dr Daniel Wallace, Dr Rachel Burt, Dr Juliet Taylor, Dr Steven Polyak

Affiliate Member Representatives:

A/Prof Nick Antic Representing Australasian Sleep Association
Professor John Slavotinek Representing The RANZ College of Radiologists
Professor Hedy Zola Representing AAMRI
Prof Peter Clifton President Aust Atherosclerosis Society
Dr Quentin Schwarz Representing A & NZ Soc for Cell & Dev. Bio. Inc
Dr Malcolm Smith Representing Australian Rheumatology Association
Dr Ben Saxon Representing ANZSBT
Prof Cherrie Galletly Representing A'asian Society for Psychiatric Rsh
Professor Philip Aylward Representing Cardiac Society of Australia & N Z
Professor Derek Chew Representing Cardiac Society of Australia & N Z
Dr Katherine Friend Representing Human Genetics Society of A'asia
Mr Gerald Atkins Representing ANZ Bone & Mineral society
Prof Bik To Representing Haematology Society of A&NZ
Prof Nigel Stocks Representing RACGP
Prof Steve Kisely Representing The Royal ANZ College of Psychiatrists
A/Prof Toby Coates Representing Transplantation Society of ANZ

In Attendance: Catherine West

Item 1 – Welcome and Apologies – Dr Emma Parkinson-Lawrence
Dr Emma Parkinson-Lawrence opened the meeting at 4:45pm welcoming all present. The following apologies were tabled –

Prof Manohar Garg President Nutrition Society of Australia Inc
Dr Maria Tomasic President The Royal Aust and NZ College of Psychiatrists
Dr Jennifer Alexander CEO The Royal Australasian College of Physicians
Prof Claire Jackson President The RACGP
Prof Steve Wilton President Australasian Gene Therapy Soc Inc
Dr Elizabeth Farrell President Australasian Menopause Society
A/Prof Matthew Gillespie Hon Sec ANZ Bone & Mineral Society
Mr Mark Hassal Representing Australian Medical Students’ Association

Dr Paul Dawson moved that the Minutes of the Meeting of September 7 2010 be accepted as a true and accurate reflection of that meeting; seconded by Dr Kristen Nowak.

Item 2 – Professional Development – Dr Juliet Taylor
Dr Taylor reported on the Professional Development Day (PDD) held in Melbourne during the Australian Health and Medical Research Congress (AHMRC) in November 2010. She advised that the event was aimed at mid-career researchers with a strong focus on obtaining and maintaining a successful research career. There has been positive feedback from participants and Dr Taylor extended her thanks to the facilitator Dr Sarah Meachem and all who helped with this successful event. Planning for the 2011 PDD is now underway. Dr Taylor reminded the meeting that the ASMR Mentoring Program is available to members. This online service is for mid and early career researchers.
Item 3 - ASMR MRW® - A/Prof Naomi Rogers

A/Prof Rogers advised that planning is well underway for ASMR MRW® 2011. Held each year in the first week of June, events include high school career seminars, public outreach such as 'Science in the Cinema' and 'Dinner with a Scientist', state scientific meetings, gala dinners, rural schools tours and of course, the national tour by the ASMR Medalist which includes the NAB Televised Address at the National Press Club of Australia. The week is designed to raise the profile of health and medical research in the community. A/Prof Rogers urged affiliate members to participate in 2011. She thanked the hardworking state committees who make the week possible.

Item 4 - Media – Dr Kristen Nowak

Dr Nowak reporting also on behalf of Catherine West, advised that media coverage for stories generated out of the AHMRC in November reached more than two million Australians while ASMR MRW® coverage through print, television and radio, reached more than nine million.

Item 5 - AHMRC and NSC 2010 – Dr Rosemary Keogh

Dr Keogh advised that there were 1500 delegates, more than 50 international and 130 national speakers at the 5th AHMRC held in November 2010. The delegate survey has provided positive feedback. She thanked all the participating organisations, the programming committee and ASN Events for their sterling efforts. The 49th ASMR National Scientific Conference was held as part of AHMRC, convened by A/Prof Gilda Tachedjian with the theme of “Infection and Disease”. Dr Keogh thanked A/Prof Tachedjian for her contributions.

Item 6 – AHMRC 2012 – Dr Emma Parkinson-Lawrence

Dr Parkinson-Lawrence advised that the 6th AHMRC will take place in 2012. Discussions are currently taking place regarding the venue which will be announced soon.

Item 7 – NSC 2012 – Dr Roger Yazbek

Dr Yazbek reported that the 50th NSC is to be held in November (13-16) at the Cairns Convention Centre with the theme of Indigenous Health – “Action on Prevention”. Prof Kerin O’Dea is heading up the program committee. Speakers are currently being confirmed and information will be available on the website.

Item 8 – President’s Report – Dr Emma Parkinson-Lawrence

Dr Parkinson-Lawrence opened her report by advising that she is delighted to be president as the ASMR celebrates its 50th Anniversary. Established in 1961, the first meeting of the society was held on 12th August in Sydney. The Society has grown enormously since that first meeting 50 years ago. ASMR’s integrity and commitment to public, political and scientific advocacy are the hallmarks of an organization widely respected in all arenas of its activities.

Speaking of the time when she joined the South Australian ASMR committee in 1999, Dr Parkinson-Lawrence reported that the society had begun to establish a truly national identity. The drive began with the campaign for a consistently timed and national medical research week and saw the commencement of ASMR MRW® week. The ASMR Medallist award was created to provide a national focus for the week with the award recognizing an eminent national or international individual who has contributed through scientific endeavour and/or political advocacy; both are now flagship events for the Society. The inaugural Medallist in 1998 was Nobel Prize Winner, Professor Peter Doherty, a real coup at the time. The Medallist tour continues to be a major part of ASMR MRW® with the Medallist speaking at gala dinners in each state across the week and also presenting the televised NAB address at the National Press Club in Canberra. The ASMR Medalist tour is a vehicle which provides an opportunity for the current health and medical research (HMR) messages to be heard.

As parliament sat for the first time in 2011, Australians were being challenged both physically and mentally with unprecedented meteorological events. Australia now faces the fiscal constraints from both the recent global economic crisis and natural disasters, which together will undoubtedly continue to inflict pressure and lead to budget limitations. The NHMRC budget again appears to be under threat of being cut and the ASMR has put a call out to its members
to write to politicians extolling the value and benefits of HMR. As you are already aware the current cycle of NHMRC funding has ended which in real terms means that we are experiencing a decline in funding moving forward. Cuts to an already declining funding pool will only have disastrous consequences to the sector. It is therefore of paramount importance that the sector unite as one voice to deliver the message that investment in HMR delivers not only health but substantial economic benefit to all Australians: an estimated net benefit of $29.5 billion between 1993 and 2005 and a return of up to $6.00 for every dollar invested in Australian health R & D. The health and economic argument is indeed compelling but the sector must look at a broader narrative, finding a voice and champions in economic, business and education forums. It is time for the Australian HMR sector to articulate its vision for the next 5-10 years and to successfully do this we are going to need a united front. Dr Parkinson-Lawrence called on representatives of the sector to come together and agree upon crucial points to take to government.

HMR underpins health delivery and is a pivotal component of the government’s vision for healthcare reform in Australia. Clearly there is a pipeline for the translation of HMR into improved health outcomes, beginning with the discovery of new knowledge from basic and fundamental research and culminating in its translation into practice. This critically aligns with the government’s current initiatives on implementation of the health reform agenda, which can only be strengthened by continued support for our HMR workforce. There is an ongoing need to build meaningful and sustainable employment.

To facilitate translation, practicing clinicians who are actively engaged in research are an important component of the HMR workforce. Closely aligned with the Government’s health reform strategy surrounding hospital-based research, clinicians also represent an important conduit between research of clinical relevance and its rapid implementation into better clinical practice. In a recent extension of ASMR’s workforce survey ‘Planning the Health and Medical Research Workforce 2010-2019”, we sought to determine the number of clinicians actively engaged in research and what was their funding source. While a significant proportion of clinician researchers were funded through the NHMRC, they make up on average, only 2.5% of the total workforce at our leading medical research institutes. Over the last 2 years constraints on the NHMRC budget have led to an alarming decline in funding for the nation’s best and brightest researchers through the NHMRC Senior Fellowships scheme. In 2010, none of applicants ranked as ‘excellent’ by their peers received funding (an unprecedented decrease from the 67% funded in 2008 and 35% funded in 2009).

The ASMR is urging the government to facilitate the implementation of the Government’s health form agenda through increased support for Australia’s world-class health and medical research workforce in the 2011/12 Federal Budget.

In ASMR’s quest to advocate for the continued support of the sector we continue to investigate models for sustained funding, including those used in other sectors. ASMR is exploring the possibility of an Asia Pacific Union similar to that of the European Framework Program 7. At the 5th AHMRC, ASMR hosted the forum ‘Framework for the Future - An Asia Pacific HMR Funding Union’. Whilst the forum highlighted that an Asia Pacific funding model similar to that of the European Framework Program 7 model would have its inherent difficulties, if there is a focus on translating aspirations into objectives the vision is achievable, but it will take time. A feature article summarising the forum can be found in Nature Medicine (volume 17, Number 1, January 2011, pp8-9).

ASMR Medical Research Week® (June 2nd-10th) will again be a major highlight of the HMR calendar. The week provides a unique opportunity for demystifying the barriers between researchers, our community and government. Preparations are well underway around the country and will include career development programs, scientific meetings, public outreach events, high school career programs and gala dinners. For more information about events occurring in your state please visit the ASMR website (http://www.asmr.org.au/MRW.html).

A highlight of ASMR Medical Research Week® is the ASMR Medallist tour. It is an honour and pleasure to announce that the 2011 ASMR Medallist is Nobel Laureate Professor Barry J. Marshall AC, Clinical Professor, The University of Western Australia. Professor Marshall has
been described as “A medical pioneer whose work transcends all boundaries.” Professor Marshall will present at all ASMR MRW® state gala dinners and will deliver the televised NAB address at the National Press Club on June 8th.

The 5th Australian Health and Medical Research congress was held at the new Melbourne Convention Centre in November 2010. A biannual event, over 1500 delegates were attracted to a plethora of enthralling presentations in this multi-disciplinary environment. Delegates appreciated the rare opportunity of being able to attend sessions outside their specific area of expertise. Dr Parkinson-Lawrence thanked Convenor Dr Rosemary Keogh and Program Convenor Dr Michael Hickey for putting together such a stellar conference. The 2010 ASMR National Scientific Conference (NSC) “Infection and Disease” was held as part of the AHMRC. Dr Parkinson-Lawrence thanked the NSC Convenor A/Prof Gilda Tachedjian.

Dr Parkinson-Lawrence announced that the 50th ASMR NSC is on Indigenous Health: Action on Prevention and will be held from Sunday November 13th to Wednesday November 16th, 2011 at the Cairns Convention Centre. The ASMR NSC Convenor Dr Roger Yazbek, together with the Scientific Programming Committee Chair Professor Kerin O’Dea is already assembling an exciting, integrated and thought provocative program.

In closing her report, Dr Parkinson-Lawrence extended best wishes to all with grant submissions in 2011.

Professor Malcolm Smith (Australian Rheumatology Association) commented on issues related to NHMRC voicing concerns about -

- the ongoing problems with RGMS
- lack of transparency
- the structure of the grant review process/conflict of interest particularly as it relates to smaller organisations

Dr Parkinson-Lawrence advised that these comments will be taken on board and that ASMR consistently supports transparency and consultancy. Other affiliate representatives voiced similar concerns and Dr Parkinson-Lawrence cautioned that these issues need to be addressed in a way which gives due consideration to the current political environment.

**Item 9 – Other Business**

There being no other business, Dr Parkinson-Lawrence closed the meeting at 5:25pm.