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Message from the Chairman of the Forum



Forum Chairman Professor Barry Furr

I feel both delighted and very privileged to have been invited to take over as Chairman of the Academy's Forum. Sir John Skehel, my predecessor, did an excellent job in setting up the Forum and establishing its place at the interface between academia and industry. I recognise that the years ahead will be a challenge and look forward to your support in extending the success of the Forum.

We have a busy agenda going forward. This Autumn, we shall publish the Forum's first Report on 'Safer Medicines', which will evaluate the approaches to ensuring the safety of medicines. I know this is an important area for many Forum Members.

Then in September, we launch our series of Medical Science Briefings, which will run through the Autumn and Spring. These are described elsewhere in the newsletter.

It is very important that we listen to the needs and concerns of our Forum Members across the country as we plan our future seminars and lobbying campaigns. I hope to meet many of you at our various events throughout the year: but please contact either me or our Forum Programme Officer, Jenny Steere, with your thoughts and ideas.

For the Forum to be even more successful we must have input from the full membership both in terms of important issues that require review and symposium topics that will excite interest. I hope that we can work together to achieve both an informative and influential programme.



Forum Annual meeting and lecture

Professor Markham delivering his lecture

The Annual Forum meeting and lecture in March were once again an excellent opportunity for Forum members to network and meet with Academy Fellows.

This year, speakers from the EU Research Directorate General, the UK Research Office and the European Federation of Pharmaceutical Industries and Associations (EFPIA) gave presentations on the European Framework Programme 7.

In the evening, Professor Alex Markham FMedSci, Chief Executive of Cancer Research UK, delivered the third Annual Forum Lecture entitled: 'Cancer research in the UK: areas of optimism and concern'. Professor Markham expressed concern that, with cancer now the number one killer in the developed world, the survival rate in the UK is significantly lower than in many other countries in Europe.

But there are encouraging signs of progress: the NHS Cancer Plan has set out clear targets, many of which have already been delivered. Several major projects have received significant funding as a result of the establishment of a National Cancer Research Institute, and patient recruitment



Professor Alex Markham (centre) is flanked by current Forum Chairman Professor Barry Furr (left) and former Chairman Sir John Skehel (right)

for research programmes has been increased through the National Cancer Research Network.

Some goals for the work of Cancer Research UK were set out, including achieving a substantial increase in funding over coming years, and building on the success of its technology transfer arm, Cancer Research Technology.

Non-human primate Working Group examining evidence

In March, the Academy was one of four organisations to come together and set up an independent Working Group to examine the recent, current and future scientific basis for biological and medical research involving non-human primates.

Members of the Working Group, chaired by Sir David Weatherall have already met several times.

Sir David said: 'Changes are occurring in the capacity for the UK and other countries around the world to carry out research using non-human primates. These changes particularly affect the availability of animals, trained personnel and facilities. The study will assess the nature and extent of these changes and what implications they might have for future research. In the UK, the 3Rs principles of refinement, reduction and

replacement are rigorously applied to all experiments using animals, particularly non-human primates. We hope to establish areas where alternatives, such as genetically modified mice or computer modelling, might be an appropriate option. Equally, the study will examine areas of research where there is likely to be continuing need for primate use. We have had an excellent response to the call for evidence, including from the Academy's Forum members.'

Professor Barry Furr, Chairman of the Industry Forum, said 'I urge members who have not already made a submission to this working group either to do so directly or through the Forum'

Full details of the study can be obtained from the Academy's dedicated website, www.nhpstudy.com

New programme of Medical Science Briefings

Forum members will be able to learn more about and discuss topical developments in medical science from Academy Fellows at a series of Briefings to be held through the Autumn and Spring.

The informal Briefings will be held at the end of the working day, initially in London at either The Academy's Offices in the British Academy or the nearby Royal Society, both on Carlton House Terrace. They will be free of charge to employees of Forum companies and their guests.

At the first meeting, scheduled for 26 September, Dr Robin Lovell Badge, FRS, FMedSci, Head of the Division of Developmental Genetics at the MRC National Institute of Medical Research will discuss recent developments in stem cell science.

On 24 October, Professor Gus McGrouther FMedSci, Professor of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery at the University of Manchester, will explore how opportunities in the area of surgical reconstruction could be being missed while

we await the fruits of molecular science, under the title 'Reconstructive Surgery beats Regenerative Medicine'.

Then, on 21 November, Academy Fellows Professor Simon Wessely, Professor of Epidemiological and Liaison Psychiatry at King's College London, and Professor Stafford Lightman, Director of the Henry Wellcome Laboratory for Integrative Neuroscience & Endocrinology at the University of Bristol, will debate recent developments in our understanding of stress.

Barry Furr, Chair of the Academy's Forum says 'Forum members have told us how keen they are to use their membership as a way of learning about recent developments in medical science. We hope this series of informal briefings will enable them to do just that.'

A programme and booking form for the series will be sent out in September.

For further information please email forum@acmedsci.ac.uk

New reports available to Forum members

The academy has recently published two reports.



'Microbial Challenge Studies of Human Volunteers – a guidance document' reviews the practice of deliberately infecting volunteers with micro-organisms in order to understand disease and develop new vaccines.

While emphasising the importance of such studies, the Academy's

Working Group, chaired by Professor Richard Moxon, concludes, 'it is imperative that the standards applied to microbial challenge studies of humans should be of equivalent

stringency to those that pertain, for example, to research on drugs'. The report reviews the conduct of trials and reviews issues of ethics, transparency and accountability.

Meanwhile, the Academy's Academic Careers Committee has been conducting focus groups at ten universities in order to review the effectiveness of non-clinical fellowships in the biomedical sciences.

Their conclusions, published in the report 'Freedom to Succeed' are that to get the maximum benefit for their fellowship, research fellows need to take a more proactive approach with both funding bodies and the particular institution where they are based. Funders should concentrate on improving the quality of existing schemes, rather than on increasing the number of places available. The report offers some models of best practice.

Copies of both reports are available on request from The Academy.

Academy to advise on future use of drugs in neuroscience

The Government's Chief Scientific Adviser Sir David King has asked the Academy of Medical Sciences to undertake an independent review of the scientific issues arising from the key issues highlighted by the report 'Drugs Futures 2025' which was published on 13th July.

The report has been produced by Foresight, the Government's science-based think tank which provides independent evidence through 'horizon scanning' of what scientific advances may uncover in the next 20 years.

Set up to investigate how to manage the use of psychoactive substances in the future to the best advantage for the individual, community and society, Drugs Futures 2025 is based on a scientific review of possible opportunities and risks that may influence future research, industry investment and public policy.

Welcoming the Government's invitation to undertake the review, Academy President Professor Sir Keith Peters said

'We are delighted that the Government has come to the Academy as a source of reliable and independent scientific advice. We look forward to pointing up the research and public policy issues and enabling government to move forward in a practical way.'

'To address the various important areas raised by the Foresight team we shall draw on the broad expertise of our Fellowship, which ranges across all aspects of medical science. We also plan to involve representatives of the pharmaceutical companies and the other scientific bodies who come together in our Forum.'

Professor Barry Furr said 'Jenny Steere, the Forum Programme Officer, and I would very much welcome the views of Forum members on the above so that they can be taken into account in any submission that the Academy makes to Government. It would be very helpful to receive such comments by 14 October.'



New Academy Fellows

40 leading medical scientists became Fellows of the Academy at the 2005 Admission Ceremony on 24th June.

Amartya Sen, Lamont University Professor and Professor of Economics and Philosophy at Harvard University, and a former Master of Trinity College, Cambridge, was elected an Honorary Fellow. A Nobel Prize winner and former Honorary President of Oxfam, Professor Sen is a

world-renowned authority on global inequality and economic development.

Several new Fellows delivered short papers at the meeting. These included geneticist Professor Wendy Bickmore, Professor Janet Darbyshire of the NRC Clinical Trails Unit and Professor Christopher Edwards, Vice Chancellor of Newcastle University.

New Fellow Professor Raymond Hill of the Neuroscience Research Centre at Merck Sharp & Dohme signs the Fellows Book