



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
VICTORIA

ST VINCENT'S INSTITUTE OF MEDICAL RESEARCH 60TH ANNIVERSARY

Monday 23 April, 2018

Mr Frank McGuire MP, Parliamentary Secretary for Medical Research, and for Small Business and Innovation

Mr Tony Reeves, Chair, St Vincent's Institute of Medical Research

Professor Tom Kay, Director, St Vincent's Institute of Medical Research

Ms Karen Inge, Chair, St Vincent's Institute of Medical Research Foundation Board

Patrons

Distinguished guests

Ladies and gentlemen

First, I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land upon which we are gathering and pay my respects to their elders past and present and to any elders here with us this evening.

Sixty years ago – to the day – the St Vincent's School of Medical Research (as it was then known) opened its doors and began its outstanding work.

Tony and I are delighted to welcome you to Government House for this anniversary celebration.

Often at such a celebration, I might reflect that we would not be standing here today but for the vision of a particular doctor, researcher or scientist.

Although there are plenty of those who have contributed to this Institute, the fact is that in this case – a little unusually – we would not be standing here today without the vision of a particular man: a racehorse trainer.

This Institute might not have been born but for the extraordinary generosity of racehorse trainer Jack Holt. (It is no wonder that you are a beloved group in Melbourne: we love both our biosciences AND our horseracing. You have both in your DNA!)

Jack Holt's generosity was prompted by the loss of his sister, Catherine, and his desire to contribute to medical research in her memory.

Indeed, the generosity of philanthropy, as well as the ethos of helping others, both lie at the heart of your history, and that of your affiliate, the St Vincent's Hospital, that – for its part – has devoted 125 years of service to the Victorian community, and of which I am the proud Patron.

It is apparent that, from the start, this Institute has played a significant role in medical advances.

SVI's very first Director, Dr Pehr Edman and his colleagues, developed a machine that automated protein sequencing, allowing scientists to identify the building blocks of proteins at an unprecedented speed and scale, thereby helping us to better understand many cellular and disease processes.

Despite Dr Edman's premature death, the legacy of his work has been continued in your Structural Biology Unit, the first in a medical research unit in Australia. And the Unit's work has been translated into great success in areas such as secondary bone cancer, diabetes and obesity.

It is interesting for me to learn more about an organisation when we are preparing to host an anniversary celebration such as this. It is not hard to see what makes it tick.

In your case, in addition to the generosity of your supporters that I have already touched upon, I see two other aspects that say so much about who you are.

The first is that your work at the Institute is defined by a clear focus on the common but stubborn diseases that present major health challenges for Australians today.

Diabetes, bone disease, and cancer. Obesity, Alzheimer's and heart disease.

And so your work goes right to the heart (forgive the awful pun) of our community's health and well-being.

I also note that, in 60 years, this Institute has had only four Directors. (Perhaps, behind closed laboratory doors, there is secret work being conducted on longevity!)

What a remarkable record that is. It speaks to an unbending determination to continue and complete ground-breaking work. It speaks to the Directors' dedication. And it speaks to the fertile ground that is laid for their work by the Board.

I am so pleased that this evening we are joined former SVI Director Professor Jack Martin, and of course the current Director Professor Tom Kay, (with whose enthusiasm I am already well acquainted).

Professor Kay, you have led SVI as Director for sixteen years, and overseen new developments and exciting research pursuits – including the creation of the Stem Cell Regulation Unit ten years ago. We thank you.

There are also many others to thank.

Of course there are the researchers and other staff members, who invest their time and intellect to pursue or support excellence in medical research: we thank you for your brilliance and your resilience.

To the higher degree students – and all students – who are gaining their first taste of medical research in this remarkable institute, thank you for all that you do, and for all that you *will* do in the course of your careers.

Thank you to the Institute Board and its members, who so generously give their time, expertise and passion: volunteers one and all. A special welcome to the relatively new Chair, Tony Reeves, and congratulations to the former Chair, Brenda Shanahan on her 14 years' of service.

Thank you too to the Foundation Board, led by your Chair, Karen Inge, who is impressive as a health expert and as an individual. And of course thanks must go to all the generous donors and benefactors in the room – and beyond.

And finally, to the patrons, who are such great champions for the Institute's work: Sir Gus Nossal AC CBE, Mr John Ralph AC and Mr Gerald Snowden who are here with us this evening. And thank you, as well, to Susan Alberti AC, who couldn't be here with us tonight.

On behalf of the people of Victoria, I can say that we are immensely proud of St Vincent's Institute of Medical Research.

Happy 60th birthday, and we look forward to celebrating many more birthdays and many more research successes with you in the future.