2017 ANNUAL SCIENTIFIC MEETING OF THE MEDICAL ONCOLOGY GROUP OF AUSTRALIA

Thursday 3rd August, 2017

Associate Professor Chris Karapetis, Chair, Medical Oncology Group of Australia
Associate Professor Linda Mileshkin, Deputy Director of Medical Oncology, Peter MacCullum Cancer Centre
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 morning.

It is a great honour to welcome you all to the Medical Oncology Group of Australia’s Annual Scientific Meeting.

It is a particular pleasure to have so many distinguished visitors to Melbourne, from interstate and overseas: including from Portugal, the USA, New Zealand and Germany.

As Governor, I am of course honoured that your Planning Committee chose Victoria to host the Meeting this year.

I hope you’ll forgive me - as the Governor of Victoria – for a touch of parochialism, if I suggest that there could hardly be a better place for it.

As Victorians, we are very proud of our research sector, and our biomedical research capacity in particular.

Just over a year ago, we celebrated the opening of the Comprehensive Cancer Centre in Parkville, an extraordinary facility that brings together research and treatment expertise from a range of disciplines and specialties.
But the presence of our international guests is a reminder, if any were needed, that there is nothing parochial about cancer. It respects no borders. The continuing effort to better understand this disease matters to all people, everywhere.

By any standard, Australians enjoy access to very high quality cancer care. That’s partly because this is a wealthy country, one in which cancer research is highly valued by the general public.

But it’s also because of a culture of excellence in your profession. It’s because of the determination of individual specialists, working through the Medical Oncology Group of Australia, to strive for the highest possible standards of education and practice.

The challenge of finding ever-better treatments exists, like any great endeavour, in a real-world context: of finite and variable funding, of politics and regulatory challenges and sometimes complex links with industry.

For 37 years now, MOGA has worked for uncompromising standards of training and education in oncology medicine.

It has represented the expertise of its members to government, industry and the community.

And, of course, it has also campaigned for resources -- an effort that is, in effect, advocacy on behalf of every patient and every family facing the ordeal of a cancer diagnosis.

Perhaps above all, it has enriched its members’ practice with a strong emphasis on collaboration.

Oncology may be a relatively young discipline, but in just a few decades, MOGA has forged strong and practical links with related organisations in Australia – such as the Cancer Council and Cancer Australia – but also with other like organisations around the world.

This emphasis on collaboration recognises that in a field that is constantly evolving, cooperative research and information-sharing is essential.
I applaud the collegial spirit in which you come together here this week to share experience and to learn from one another.

As you know, the theme of this year’s Meeting is ‘Real World Oncology: Translating Discovery into Practice’.

That theme is a reminder to non-experts such as myself, that while research discoveries capture the headlines, they are only the first step on the path to advances in patient care.

As oncologists, you are both researchers who work every day to push forward our understanding of various cancers, and clinicians who provide sensitive, practical care for patients dealing with frightening and debilitating illnesses.

As I was preparing my remarks for this morning it occurred to me that there can be few subspecialties in medicine, or perhaps in any field at all, where developments are followed as eagerly by the wider community – or with as much hope.

Usually at a professional conference like this, I would take the opportunity to urge visitors to make the most of their time in Victoria: to sample some of our state’s restaurants, wineries and museums, to visit Melbourne’s famous laneways, take in the beauty of the Great Ocean Road or perhaps take in a game of Aussie Rules Football at the MCG.

Judging from what seems an impressively rigorous program, I am not sure that such opportunities will arise.

Yesterday was a busy day, I believe, for trainees and junior consultants in particular. This morning two of our eminent international guests, Professors Sebastian Stintzing and Fatima Cardoso, have already been hard at work, generously sharing their experiences, expertise and insights.

And you all have a few very full days ahead.
However, I cannot imagine any professional group who is more in need of the reminder to take time out while you are here - not just to enjoy the world’s most liveable city - but most importantly, to take care of yourselves.

I commend and thank each of you for your commitment to work that means so much to so many families living with cancer today, and to those who will benefit from today’s discoveries in the future.

It is a pleasure for me now to declare the 2017 Annual Scientific Meeting of the Medical Oncology Group of Australia officially open.