



RESEARCH INNOVATION 2017

RESHAPING RESEARCH

BUILDING MEANINGFUL
PARTNERSHIPS FOR
RESEARCH COLLABORATION
AND COMMERCIALISATION



Associate Professor Kevin Pflieger is a National Health and Medical Research Council Research Fellow, and is the head of Molecular Endocrinology and Pharmacology at the Harry Perkins Institute of Medical Research and Centre for Medical Research, The University of Western Australia, where he runs a laboratory group researching hormone therapies.

Kevin is also Chief Scientific Advisor of Dimerix Limited, a spin-out company from the Perkins and The University of Western Australia.

Ahead of Research Innovation 2017 we chat to Kevin about the need to reshape the research sector and the culture surrounding it. Kevin also shares insights into building meaningful partnerships for better research collaboration and commercialisation that will ultimately see economy-wide benefits.



EXPECTATIONS

Research Innovation has continued to build momentum since the 2015 National Innovation and Science Agenda, with several moves towards improving commercialisation and collaboration including the review of R&D tax incentives in October 2016.

Although Australia is a benchmark for research excellence, it is still a minnow when it comes to commercialisation and industry partnership. To change this we must first change our societal outlook and expectations.

“All this current talk about innovation, translation and commercialisation is extremely positive for the research sector. We have a few issues though that make progress difficult.

Firstly having a **stable funding and investment environment** is really important for both researchers and industry so that they can plan for the future. As the environment is constantly chopping and changing, planning research initiatives proves difficult.

Secondly, the research sector - universities and academics - are often **criticised for ‘just publishing papers’** and not translating them into tangible benefits for the economy. However, when you apply for a fellowship or grant, the main criteria upon which you are judged are the number and quality of publications you have.

Thirdly - and this requires a cultural change too - it’s **important to manage expectations**. Research is a slow process - we’re working in an industry where it might take 20 years to see a benefit, but we now live in a society that works on 100-day cycles, which is not compatible.

We need to look at rewarding people for their individual contributions to the sector. While alone, a certain piece of laboratory research might not have a direct benefit to patients, when strategically incorporated into the discovery and development pipeline, it may ultimately have an important impact.

If we want the research industry to change we first have to change behaviour. We have to change incentives, and we have to change the culture underpinning how research is judged and perceived.”



COLLABORATION

To really push the boundaries in research we have to work in multi-disciplinary teams where experts are afforded the opportunity to come together and push ideas to the next level.

“When talking about research collaboration I like to use the analogy of a 4x100 metre relay. As medical researchers who do fundamental research, we often sprint the first 100 metres and we publish a wonderful paper, but we don't always pass the baton on to the next person.

Fundamental medical research is very important, and as researchers we have an obligation to pass the baton, our knowledge in other words, on to the next person who can then take it and pass it to the next person and the next. So while our research doesn't directly reach patients, through collaboration we are part of the process that will eventually make a difference.

So why isn't the baton passed on? This is often because the next person is in a different field, or a different industry. We need help to make those connections and speak what is frequently a different language.

To further develop this idea of collaboration, I have recently become Chair of the Steering Committee of Accelerating Australia. This is a consortium focused on collaboration to develop a culture of innovation that supports the progression of Australian medical research through to real world outcomes, all through the provision of a mentoring network and training programmes adapted from global best practice in innovation and entrepreneurship.

The consortium, made up of 19 different entities including innovation training providers, universities, medical research institutes, healthcare providers and businesses, really is all about facilitating training not only for students and employees, but anybody that wants to learn how to collaborate and commercialise their research.

We owe it to the community to translate research as effectively as possible and this Australia-wide collaboration between industry, healthcare providers and academia will take an important step towards that goal.”



COMMERCIALISATION

Traditionally in the university sector researchers have been able to ask questions that really excite them, leading to great investigator-driven research. This should continue, but when asking these questions, researchers should always consider how their research can address real world problems.

“I think the great thing about collaboration between industry and academia is that we can better understand the needs of industry and actually understand what we, as researchers, can do to help the community beyond that research environment.

Through Accelerating Australia initiatives we're trying to train an entire generation of researchers to really think about innovation within the context of commercialisation - and that requires a collaborative effort between government, industry and academia.

When looking to commercialise research through collaboration with industry, it's important we get the drivers right. We need to take a long-term view whereby the entire innovation pipeline is incentivised to progress research through to tangible impactful outcomes.

So while we have to understand what's required by industry and what's required by the medical community, we also need to make sure that we are still doing exciting, innovative fundamental research, even if it takes 20 or 30 years for the full impact to be realised.”



If you'd like to hear more about reshaping perspectives of the research sector, collaborating to ensure ideas become tangible solutions, and commercialising research to cater to industry and economic needs, then join Kevin at **Research Innovation 2017**.

Attend the event in Sydney on 4th - 5th April to hear from over 25 industry experts, including scientists, research partners and universities.

For special early bird pricing and to secure your ticket now, simply fill in the **form** and email to **registration@iqpc.com.au**