Murdoch University

Launch of Centre for Molecular Medicine and Innovative Therapeutics

Address by the Honourable Kim Beazley AC
Governor of Western Australia

Friday 22nd February 2019

I would firstly like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet – the Wadjuk Noongar people – and pay my respects to their elders past, present and emerging.

I want to congratulate Professor Eeva Leinonen, on becoming chair of the Innovative Research Universities Group. This event today is pretty symbolic of their emerging value. Particularly that objective of delivering first class research with real-world benefits.

Australia is becoming a more powerful global player than it understands. The Global Britain Programme, authored by the Henry Jackson Society, released earlier this year an audit of Geopolitical capability of 20 major powers. Incorporated within its judgements was a calculation of each nation's research and technological base. The U.S., China and U.K. were up there but France, Germany, Japan, Canada and Australia were next in line. A statistic worth conjuring with here is that our 0.3% of the world's population produces 3.9% of the world's research publications. Not so good though our conversion to commercial outcomes. This centre is aimed at this issue.

It is therefore a great pleasure to participate in the launch of the Centre for Molecular Medicine and Innovative Therapeutics.

Western Australia's relatively small population and isolation makes it all the more difficult for Western Australian organisations to compete on the global stage. It is therefore essential that our organisations collaborate wherever possible. Competition is fine but collaborative competition often provides a better model to compete internationally.

We should applaud the initiative taken by Murdoch University and the Perron Institute (of which I am proud to be Patron) in forming a joint venture and combining their considerable skills and expertise to address some of the big challenges facing healthcare today.

The Centre has a particularly strong base as it builds on the successes of Professors Steve Wilton and Sue Fletcher in developing drugs for the treatment of Duchenne muscular dystrophy.

It is great therefore to welcome Billy Ellsworth and his mother, Terri as well as two representatives from Sarepta Therapeutics, Doctors Marco Passini and Fred Schnell, to Western Australia and to today's event.

Billy has Duchenne muscular dystrophy and is living proof of the life-changing benefits of drugs discovered here in Western Australia by Steve Wilton and Sue Fletcher, and developed commercially by Sarepta Therapeutics in Boston – an incredible example of successful US/WA collaboration.

To put this into context, I understand that the first of the drugs, Exondys-51, approved by the US Food and Drug Administration, is fast emerging as the one of the most successful drug launches ever for a rare disease. This provides confirmation that, contrary to some conventional thinking, drugs for rare diseases can be commercialised.

The theme of this new Centre is precision medicine. Its focus is on developing personalised therapies tailored to the individual needs of patients and it is gratifying to see how researchers from Murdoch and the Perron are working together to tackle diseases as diverse as multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's disease, blood disorders and motor neurone disease.

For millions of people around the world suffering from life-threatening and chronic illnesses, medical research is the beginning of hope for cures and for advances that improve quality of life. Medical research is an investment in the future quality of healthcare.

The Centre is a welcome and timely addition to the State's medical research infrastructure with the potential to significantly expand our capacity in the field of precision medicine and improve patient lives.

I congratulate Murdoch University and the Perron Institute for their hard work in bringing this important joint-venture for our State to fruition.

I am pleased to declare the Centre officially open.