
CSBMCB President's Report

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Introduction

This has been an interesting year for biomedical science and for me, as the President of the CSBM-CB, an exciting and busy one. Although most of my attention has been on what can be broadly termed "advocacy", there are a number of other issues that will continue to develop.

Our major concern is, of course, funding for research. The case for biomedical research in general, and basic biomedical research in particular, has always to be made. To be fair, the relevance of projects on the cell cycle studies in yeast and frog's eggs, or oligonucleotide chemistry, or random retrovirus insertions in mice, to, for example, cancer, can be difficult to explain to the public, bureaucrats and our elected representatives, but, as we know, they were essential contributions to our understanding of the cancer process. Perhaps we need better education of our fellow citizens and politicians. Certainly we need to learn how to more effectively communicate the value of fundamental research.

Thanks

The CSBMCB owes its smooth running and dynamism to a small number of dedicated individuals. The administrative functions of CSBMCB are contracted out to the office of the CFBS, where they are ably handled by Wafaa Antonious, the CFBS manager and her assistant Laila Riad. The CFBS, under contract from the CSBMCB, administers our membership list, deals with subscriptions, and distributes communications to our members and for our annual meetings. They also work with Stephen Lau, who manages our website.

I am proud to be working with the dedicated group of volunteers that comprise the CSBMCB board. Vince Duronio (UBC), our Treasurer and Albert Clark (Queen's), our Secretary, have, and are doing, a wonderful job. Dev Mangroo (Guelph), Frances Sharom (Guelph), Linda Penn (U of T),

George Chaconas (Calgary), Guy Poirier (Laval), and John Orłowski (McGill) serve the CSBMCB in myriad ways. I would also like to thank Joe Casey (U of A) whose (metaphorically) large shoes I had to fill, and who steered me through a number of sensitive issues. The next President of the CSBMCB is Eric Brown (McMaster) and although my feet are smaller, I look forward to working with him.



Advocacy

Advocacy is one of the most important services that the CSBMCB offers to the community, and the past year has been very eventful. As all of you probably know, there was a letter to Science signed by 40 of our colleagues protesting the method of review employed by Genome Canada. They had employed a due diligence on co-funding and management of the projects by KPMG. Projects had to pass this process before being scientifically peer-reviewed. Although many of us were not in favour of protesting Canadian science funding in this way, many of our colleagues wanted to show their support for the fundamental principle of scientific peer review to find the best science. Thus we hosted the Canadian Science Petition (http://www.csbmcb.ca/e_index.html) and currently we have 1,363 signatures.

Some of the original signatories and myself arranged a meeting with David Emerson, who was then the Liberal cabinet Minister of Industry Canada. Unfortunately, he was not at the meeting, but we did find out that the Federal Government was conducting a review of all genomics funding. We solicited your opinions to

submit a brief to the review. We expressed our support for genomics funding; it impacts most of what we all do these days. However, we questioned the mechanism by which it is currently distributed. For example, you questioned the effectiveness of large scale projects that have to accomplish their goals in 3 or 4 years; and there were many advocates for smaller scale projects that use the considerable genomics information that is already freely available to all of us. Dr. Janet King, Director of the Life Sciences Branch of Industry Canada, recently gave a presentation of how this review is being conducted and the data analyzed. Surprisingly, although many government departments and Genome Canada receive specific funding for genomics, NSERC and CIHR (which both fund genomics projects) do not receive any of this funding. The Federal Genomics Review should be available to us all soon.

For the CIHR external review, Joe Casey solicited your opinions and submitted a brief on behalf of the CSBMCB. A major concern of many of us was the change from the 80:20 funding system that captured the best grants, to a 100:0 system. The reasons for this change are not very clear. It certainly supposes that all grants panels see the same quality of applications, and that all areas of health research are equally well-developed in Canada. I think we all know of outstanding biomedical grant applications scoring over 4 that have not been funded. Other issues of concern were the large number of CIHR institutes of uneven effectiveness; the increasing emphasis on Team grants; the declining proportion of the total CIHR budget that goes to biomedical research; and the low number of biomedical researchers on the Governing Council of the CIHR.

The CFBS, of which the CSBMCB is an associate member, has carried out advocacy and information sessions for parliamentarians in Ottawa over the years. Bruce Sells, who as Executive Director, carried out these functions superbly, has decided to retire. He has been replaced by Art Olson, a biochemist trained at the University of Alberta who has been a deputy minister in several departments in Ottawa, and has a wealth of knowledge and

experience of the Federal government. We look forward to working with him (<http://www.cfbs.org/newsletter.html>).

It is clear to me that Canada needs a formal Science Policy. We no longer have a Science Minister, and research is a “dispersed function” that is distributed among many federal departments. We do have a Federal Science Advisor, Dr Arthur Carty, but he has a staff of 7 to attempt to coordinate all science policy for Canada. One example of this lack of coordination is between the foundations, such as the Canada Research Chairs, the Canada Foundation for Innovation, and the granting councils. I think we all know, or know of, investigators who receive funding for salary and equipment and then do not succeed in obtaining an operating grant. Broader questions on how much Canada should invest in research, what are our strengths, what areas should we develop, are all important to ensure that the taxpayer’s money is well spent. The branding of Canada as a great place to do research and a technological powerhouse is essential in a global economy where many countries are newly investing in research.

It is also clear that we need to have advocacy to Federal and Provincial governments and to the granting agencies on issues that directly affect CSBMCB members. There are two new initiatives here. The first is that Joe Casey is now Vice-President of Advocacy and Promotion for the CSBMCB for a period of 3 years. Please contact him with your ideas and concerns. Another development is from an idea of Reinhart Reithmeier’s for the creation of the Council of Biomedical Chairs. As we found that the acronym CBC was apparently already taken, this new organization will be called the CCBC (the Canadian Council of Biomedical Chairs). It will become, we hope, an effective channel for communication with the granting councils, politicians, and bureaucrats.

Finally, the most effective advocates for research are us, the researchers. Contact your local and federal politicians about your successes and concerns. Invite them to your lab, enthuse them!

International

One area in which the CSBMCB can play a more active role is in international linkages. The CSBMCB is a member of the International Union of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology, and the International Federation for Cell Biology. Joel Weiner has done stalwart service on the IUBMB over the years, and was instrumental in bringing the IUBMB meeting to Canada in 2004. You will remember that because of the SARS outbreak, the meeting was moved from Toronto to Montreal and fused with the HUPO meeting. The outcome was a very successful well-attended meeting in Montreal. Canada needs more Joels! The CSBMCB and its members should work to not only promote Canadian scientists at international meetings, but also to promote Canadian venues for more scientific meetings. We have many superb locations that are readily accessible to all the world's scientists.

CSBMCB Awards

The recognition of the achievements of our colleagues is always a pleasure. In 2005, Mark Glover, University of Alberta, and Eric Brown, McMaster University, were the worthy recipients of the Merck Frosst prize. This is an annual award to biochemists, molecular biologists or cell biologists with less than ten years of independent research experience, who have made major achievements. Many of our leading researchers have received this award. The Roche Diagnostics prize for 2005 was awarded to our distinguished colleague Dr. Chris Bleakley from the University of Alberta.

Recognizing the successes of our colleagues is always one of the great pleasures of scientific life. Nominations are always welcome, and nominees are considered for three years. Please contact Albert Clark (Queen's) clarkaf@post.queensu.ca.

Meetings

I am pleased to report that the CSBMCB is in a robust state of health. The formula of a single high-quality "Gordon Research" type conference per year has paid off. The 2005 48th Annual Meeting of the CSBMCB at the Banff Centre for the Arts, on "Cellular Dynamics" organized by the two "Ricks", Rick Wozniak and Rick Rachubinski, was a masterpiece of this genre - outstanding pre-

sentations, superb attendees, both harmony and controversy in an idyllic setting with great skiing. What scientist could wish for more?

The 49th Annual Meeting 2006 of the CSBMCB is on Membrane Proteins in Health and Disease and is being organized by a committee chaired by Reinhart Reithmeier. The meeting will be held at the White Oaks Conference Resort and Spa in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario. Reinhart and the Local Organizing Committee have put together a fantastic programme of stellar scientists and I hope to meet many/most of you there.

The 50th Annual Meeting of the CSBMCB will be in Montreal July 4-8, 2007 on the topic of "Systems and Chemical Biology". Eric Brown and myself are chairing the organizing committee (presently Mike Hallett, McGill; Guy Poirier, Laval; Dan Figeys, U of Ottawa; and the meeting coordinator, Nancy Dufour). We are developing a dynamic scientific programme. The meeting will be held at a venue that will provide affordable accommodations and is just a short stroll away from the Montreal Jazz Festival. For this 50th meeting we would like to contact as many of the original members of the Canadian Biochemical Society as possible and have your recollections of the founding and early days of our Society. Please contact me at david.thomas@mcgill.ca if you would like to contribute.

Membership

Our membership can always be increased and we rely upon our members to broadcast the advantages of the CSBMCB. We had an influx of new members from the PENCE network this year. This was organized by Steve Withers (UBC) who wished to set up a mechanism so that PENCE network members could continue to meet regularly. Many PENCE participants were already CSBMCB members and we welcome the new members.

Finally, it has been a pleasure to serve as President of the CSBMCB. I look forward to continuing to play an active role and I encourage you, too, to play an active role in your society.