

Cooksey Review Secretariat
HM Treasury, 4th Floor
1 Horse Guards Road
London
SW1A 2HQ

Re: Cooksey Review of UK Health Research - Comments from Breakthrough Breast Cancer

Dear Sir David,

Introduction

Breakthrough Breast Cancer is a charity committed to fighting breast cancer through research and education, and has established the Breakthrough Toby Robins Breast Cancer Research Centre - the UK's first dedicated breast cancer research centre - in order to obtain our vision: a future free from the fear of breast cancer. The Breakthrough Research Centre brings scientific expertise together to develop better diagnostic techniques, safe and targeted treatments for people with breast cancer and to find new ways of preventing the disease.

Breakthrough campaigns for policies that support breast cancer research and better services, as well as promoting breast cancer education and awareness amongst the general public, policy makers, health professionals and the media. The views of Breakthrough are informed by scientific and clinical breast cancer experts, by our many supporters and by members of Breakthrough's Campaigns and Advocacy Network (CAN) - people with personal experience of, or who are concerned about, breast cancer.

Breakthrough's Response – Key Points

Whilst the UK is one of the world's leading locations for conducting clinical research, Breakthrough welcomes the review of UK health research to take steps toward improving further the UK environment for clinical research.

An environment that supports joined-up working between the major funders of health research in the UK should be encouraged. Such collaboration should not be limited to specific projects of strategic significance, but to an overall cohesion in health research vision and leadership. By working together, these funders can build on strengths, minimise duplication and streamline medical research for maximum benefit to patients.

The development of new treatments, effective diagnoses and prevention strategies for disease depends not only on an effective clinical research environment, but on ensuring that the ideas from which many innovative discoveries arise are nurtured and developed. A healthy balance is required between basic, exploratory research and applied, clinical research. Insufficient emphasis of funding on fundamental or blue skies research in favour of applied research with short-term end points would risk draining the well of future innovation and creativity. As such, Breakthrough believes that a multidisciplinary research portfolio fosters innovation by promoting the interface between clinical and



non-clinical research. We would therefore express concern about restructuring that might lead to greater separation between clinical and non-clinical research programmes.

The creation of a single joint fund for UK health research would need to ensure effective strategic oversight. This is necessary not only for research conducted in hospitals and Higher Education institutes, but with health-related programmes from the other research councils - particularly the BBSRC, EPSRC and ESRC - to ensure that multidisciplinary research is not hindered. Appropriate peer review systems would need to be in place to ensure that all funding applications under consideration by a single joint fund are assessed to international standards of quality.

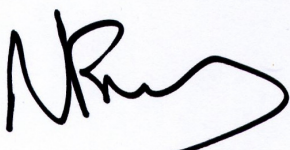
The Government has a fundamental role to provide sustainable research infrastructure within hospitals, universities and research institutes where direct research funding can be put to the best possible use. In such environments, sustainable partnerships between charity and government-funded research are vital, whereby charities continue to build on their successful achievements in supporting world-class research through public generosity. The recently launched Charity Support Fund is a welcome resource to support the UK's research infrastructure in a sustainable manner, developed through recognition of the valuable contribution of medical research charities. We would strongly encourage the consideration of a similar fund or investment that would support research funding in the NHS.

As well as the provision of suitable premises for research, attractive career structures are vital to training and retaining the best clinical academics. Such a structure needs to promote and develop clinical academics to pursue research in conjunction with clinical commitments in a supportive environment. Progress is being made in this area through the work of the Academy of Medical Sciences and the UKCRC.

A successful health research structure will need a coherent leadership to ensure an optimal environment is in place to conduct world-leading research. Using a solid evidence base, the impact of existing and proposed changes to the UK's research environment need to be assessed to ensure that regulations governing research and clinical trials do not impede research progress.

If you require any further clarification or discussion of the issues raised here, please do not hesitate do contact me at normanf@breakthrough.org.uk or tel. 020 7025 2451.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Norman Freshney
Director of Research Management

