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Sir David Cooksey – Consultation responses, Cooksey Review Secretariat
HM Treasury, 1 Horse Guards Road, London, SW1A 2HQ

28th June 2006

Dear Sir David

Re : Review of UK Health Research

Many thanks for inviting stakeholders in UK Health Services Research to submit comments to your important review of funding health research. We would like to make some suggestions on behalf of the UK Research Development Support Unit (RDSU) Network. Our research support units are paid for by the NHS and we are situated within the NHS, in Universities, and often both. Our job is to *provide training* for those in the NHS wishing to undertake health research and also to *develop individuals* to become competent high quality researchers. Sometimes we lead research ourselves, but more often we provide methodological support to clinical workers on the front line who have good ideas that require translating into answerable questions by developing a suitable and achievable study design. In relation to your review, we would like to make the following points :

1. The National RDSU Network are strong supporters of the ambitions set out in *Best Research for Best Health*.
2. In your letter inviting comments, you mention many important aspects, but you do not mention the business of research capacity and support anywhere. I am sure you will mention it in your review, but I am aware that early drafts of *Best Research for Best Health* also appeared to have forgotten about the existence of the extensive research development support unit network that was already being paid by the Department of Health, and providing excellent support for growing new researchers. As well as supporting key researchers in leading roles, developing new researchers at all levels is critical for *sustaining* the excellence in clinical research that the UK is famous for and for ensuring future research leadership. We hope therefore you will include the development of new researchers and research capacity in specific areas as an important feature in your review.
3. Like the Nobel Prize winners who wrote a letter to the Times about the funding situation, we too share some concerns that the streamlining of the MRC and the NHS R&D budget into one pot will be a means of cutting the overall budget. Deciding what proportion of the overall budget will be ring-fenced within the control of the individual departments will be a key issue.

4. We notice from the latest UK clinical collaboration (UK Health Research Analysis) that two-thirds of all health research money is currently being spent on basic science and aetiology work, and only a third on front line clinical research that might directly benefit the health and wealth of the nation. Whilst basic science and aetiological research is very important, we think that a greater overall proportion should be spent on health service research, clinical management and evaluation of treatments that will be of direct benefit to the UK population. We suggest that the balance between clinical research for direct patient benefit should be more like 50% with the other 2 categories occupying 25% each.

We trust you will take our views in the constructive way in which they are intended. If you would like to meet with our Group to discuss any of these issues further, we would be delighted for you to come along to one of our National RDSU Steering Group meetings which are held every 3 months in London. Alternatively, you are welcome to contact me or any members of the group directly if any of the points are not sufficiently clear.

Best wishes

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Hywel C Williams', with a horizontal line underneath the name.

Hywel C Williams MSc PhD FRCP
Professor of Dermato-Epidemiology and Chair of the National RDSU Network