

November 2017

Director's Response – HSRLCE External Review

It is my privilege to respond to the external review submitted by Professors Mukesh Jain and Bruce McManus. We are deeply honoured to have their support with regards to the progress of the Heart and Stroke/Richard Lewar Centre of Excellence in Cardiovascular Research (HSRLCE) and believe that many of their thoughtful recommendations will strengthen our Centre in the years to come.

When I assumed the Directorship of the HSRLCE in January 2013, there were four primary goals identified in our strategic plan. The first was to promote collaboration across the University of Toronto from basic and translational research, to clinical trials and population health. The second was to provide a multidisciplinary approach to cardiovascular disease with three focussed platforms including heart disease and diabetes, heart disease and the brain and heart failure. Thirdly, our goal was to bring the Cardiovascular Sciences Collaborative Program (CSCP) into the HSRLCE as an integrated training program for graduate students. Finally, we sought to develop an international collaboration, the Worldwide Network for Innovation in Cardiovascular Research (WNICR), between like-minded institutions with a strong history of discovery and advanced therapeutics. As acknowledged in the external report, I believe that we have achieved success on all of these four major fronts.

On a University of Toronto level, the HSRLCE has served as a model for other networks of multidisciplinary teams including the HIV Network and the Antimicrobial Resistance Network and have looked to others such as the Toronto Dementia Research Alliance (TDRA) to model innovative programs across the TAHSN Network. This is where my roles as HSRLCE Director and Vice Chair Research in the Department of Medicine intersect.

Currently, we are able to conduct our business with a budget of \$1.3 million CDN annually. This is a modest investment for a university-wide enterprise. The overall message of the review reflected our tremendous potential for growth and impact on the strong foundation developed over the past 18 years and that we will need to create a well-developed fundraising strategy to meet our goals for the next 10 years. I see this as the most pressing issue facing us in the year ahead as our original investment is coming to an end.

The specific action items arising from the external review recommendations that we believe should be adopted include:

- 1) The appointment of a small, highly distinguished external international advisory board. We believe that this will help to foster collaborations across Canada and internationally. I feel strongly that Professors Jain and McManus should be invited to join the board as founding members. We will also call upon representation from the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada, the CIHR, the US National Institutes of Health (NIH) and other leading academic centres including representation from WNICR;

- 2) The HSRLCE will undertake an aggressive fundraising campaign under the direction of the Advancement at the Faculty level. This will help us to develop strategies for branding and marketing the Centre locally, nationally and internationally;
- 3) We plan to continue our academic events including the Distinguished Visiting Professor Series and the Michael J. Sole Annual Scientific Day, but also acknowledge that for our students, we need to develop social events where trainees from a range of sites can get together to learn and network. We believe that these events should occur three times annually and that the location should be rotated between our affiliated hospitals both downtown and at Sunnybrook;
- 4) With regards to our Distinguished Visiting Professors Series, we will provide multisite video conferencing capability that would allow folks from the different member institutions to participate in our academic activities;
- 5) For our graduate students, we will provide travel awards for individuals based on merit, having demonstrated opportunity for presentation at the Canadian Cardiovascular Congress and other international meetings. We believe this will also increase our exposure nationally and internationally;
- 6) We will develop a strategic plan for the next five years as planned for after this external review. I believe that this will allow us to continue to engage our Donors Due Diligence Committee for which we meet annually with the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada and Dr. Kathryn Feldman, the representative from the Lewar Family. Our strategic plan should be bold and should allow us to leverage the strengths and resources across the University of Toronto and TAHSN;
- 7) We need to align the strategic plan with that of the Faculty of Medicine and with the University of Toronto overall. I believe that our strategies of focussed and international impact will resonate with our University leadership;
- 8) We will continue to develop our presence on the Canadian landscape. The development of the Canadian Cardiovascular Collaborative with its first meeting in January 2018 will bring together leaders from the academic communities including Dr. David Naylor, former President of the University of Toronto, and Dr. Rob Howard, CEO of St. Michael's Hospital to help us develop a strategy to foster collaboration between the leading academic centres in Canada. This will not only focus on translational research but also on clinical trials and population health. This will help to form networks that would be competitive for federal funding and for collaborative funding internationally through the NIH and other international sponsors; and
- 9) To continue to engage our member institutions and hospital research institutes, and the Ted Rogers Centre for Heart Research (TRCHR). Our platform for heart failure and heart failure research is directed through the TRCHR collaboration. We are working with the TRCHR to develop strategies to harmonize our annual research days and Distinguished Visiting Professor series.

Overall, we feel invigorated after this external review, and on behalf of our Executive Committee, I would like to thank everyone who made this possible. Through this process we have learned more about ourselves and created a vision for the future. We have tremendous potential to excel on the global stage that can only be realized through following the recommendations of this review. The bottom line is that we need to establish a sound financial footing and clear targets for fundraising that will sustain us over the 10 years. We look forward to the future with great enthusiasm.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "ME Farkouh". The letters are cursive and fluid, with a large "M" and "E" at the beginning.

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