



Director's Introduction

Welcome to the 2008 Cambridge Research Institute report. This year we celebrated the first anniversary of our opening and demonstrated significant scientific productivity as groups settled in and collaborations developed. Recruitment to the second of our three research floors is almost complete, and we have made good progress in building our links with the clinic and with the rest of Cambridge.

In January, John Stingl joined from Connie Eaves' lab in Vancouver via Pathology in Cambridge as junior group leader in mammary stem cell biology. In May, Duncan Jodrell joined from Edinburgh as Professor of Cancer Therapeutics in the Clinical School and as senior group leader in CRI, to lead pharmacology and drug development. Florian Markowitz joins from Princeton in January 2009 as a junior group leader in bioinformatics to work on networks of gene expression, and finally Shankar Balasubramanian, Professor of Chemical Biology, will join as a senior group leader, jointly with the Department of Chemistry, to bring expertise in chemical biology and in drug discovery.

Our faculty of group leaders is still quite small and spans a very wide range of topics. To add further depth, and to fill some gaps such as immunology, we are delighted that five distinguished colleagues from within Cambridge have accepted our invitations to become adjunct faculty: David Adams (Wellcome Trust Sanger Institute); Tim Eisen (Department of Oncology); Douglas Fearon (Department of Medicine); Rebecca Fitzgerald (Hutchison/MRC Research Centre) and Tony Kouzarides (Wellcome Trust/Cancer Research UK Gurdon Institute). We say farewell to Anton Berns, a Scientific Advisory Board member, and welcome Susan Horwitz from the Albert Einstein College of Medicine, New York to the SAB. We also welcomed two distinguished sabbatical visitors: Prof Brian Ross in molecular imaging, and Prof John Potter (a member of the CRI Scientific Advisory Board, and until recently Head of Epidemiology at the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center, Seattle) to work on lung cancer.

Several group leaders in CRI are also active clinicians with appointments in Addenbrooke's Hospital. Our links with the clinic are important if we are to fulfil our goal of taking our science to practical clinical application. These links were strengthened this year by the appointment of Duncan Jodrell, mentioned above, and of Tim Eisen, Professor of Oncology, as CRI adjunct faculty. Carlos Caldas, Professor of Cancer Medicine and a senior group leader is Director of Research for the Cambridge Breast Unit, which opened this year a £2m new research facility, funded by Addenbrooke's Charities, adjacent to the clinic. We were also able to open, in the hospital Radiology Department, a new PET-CT scanning facility dedicated for research, the result of a collaboration between Cancer Research UK, Merck and Co Inc, Cambridge University and Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust.

We hosted several symposia and meetings. The East-West Alliance Meeting is an annual meeting of Institutions in Asia and in the West that are supported by the Li Ka Shing Foundation. The themes for the meeting were 'Stem Cell Biology' and 'Imaging and Early Detection of Cancer', with plenary lectures from Irving Weissman (Stanford University), Austin Smith (Wellcome Trust Institute for Stem Cell Research) and Kevin Brindle (CRI).

The Cambridge Cancer Centre, a virtual centre that aims to build links between cancer researchers across Cambridge, attracted 270 registrants from across the University and beyond to its second one-day symposium in June (more details on page 68). Collaborative workshops have been held with the Department of Chemistry (based on our joint graduate student programme) and with the Department of Engineering. Michelle Tuveson has launched a 'Cancer Technology Initiative' which aims to increase awareness and interest at the postdoc and graduate student level, between the CRI and the physical sciences in Cambridge. A project challenge with a small prize is open to undergraduates, and a seminar series will start in 2009. The CRI Annual Symposium on 'Unanswered Questions in the Tumour Microenvironment' was held in September. We adopted a format of four focussed scientific sessions each followed by a 45 minute panel discussion of the unanswered questions in the area under review. We were fortunate to attract an outstanding international group of speakers and discussants and the format proved a great success, to be repeated next year around the theme of 'Unanswered Questions in Tumour Monitoring'. The first Institute retreat, at St Catherine's College, Oxford, required a platform presentation and posters from every group, which made for a couple of lengthy days, offset only by some team building efforts involving shoes, newspaper and sticky tape before dinner, and the disco after. But everyone – including our Scientific Advisory Board, who joined us for the whole meeting and stayed on for individual sessions with the junior group leaders afterwards – agreed that with the Institute still recruiting, it was a useful way to find out in a short time who everyone is and what they are doing.

Finally, congratulations to Hayley Thirkettle (third year PhD student, Neal Lab) who was the winner of the Sylvia Lawler Prize in Medical Oncology, awarded by the Royal Society of Medicine. She gave a talk at the Royal Society of Medicine on June 11th titled 'Post-translational modification and intrinsic nuclear and nucleolar localisation signals targets LYRIC to sub-nuclear compartments' winning the £500 prize. Congratulations also to three of the Institute's postdoctoral scientists – Alejandra Bruna (Caldas laboratory), Joan Boren (Brindle laboratory) and Christine Feig (Tuveson laboratory) – who were each awarded prestigious Marie Curie Fellowships; and to Ian Mills and Duncan Odom who were awarded Marie Curie Training Network Grants. Duncan Odom was also awarded a five-year European Research Council Grant.

Fiona Watt was elected president of the International Society for Stem Cell Research and was also a winner of the Senior Women in Cell Biology award, given by the American Society for Cell Biology. Carlos Caldas was elected a fellow of the Royal College of Pathologists. Bruce Ponder was awarded a Knighthood in the 2008 New Year's Honours for 'services to medicine', and won the Knudson Award in Cancer Genetics from the United States NCI and the Ambuj Nath Bose Prize 2008 for medical research, awarded by the Royal College of Physicians.

Bruce Ponder