



*re:*search comment

Funding Medical Research

One of Colin Blakemore's first tasks as the new Chief Executive of the Medical Research Council was to tour the country listening to the views of the medical research community. Of particular concern to researchers has been the shortage of funding for many of the highest-rated proposals. When Blakemore came to Bristol, Cherry Lewis asked him how he was going to convince the Government that medical research urgently needed more money.

“The first thing I should say is that this Government has already made a very clear commitment to science by making a disproportionate amount of funding available over the last few years. But if it seriously wants to build a science-based economy and is concerned about sustaining the effectiveness of the considerable investments that it has made already, then it has to increase science funding even further. We are a very, very long way from the target of 3% of GDP that has been broadly adopted in Europe. And in the area of health funding we are very poorly off when judged against our main competitor, the USA, which invests eight times more per head of population than we do.

There are good data in the USA to show that every dollar invested in basic science research yields a return of about 30-40% per annum in terms of economic productivity – that's a fantastic payoff. In the particular area of health, even quite small improvements in the survival rates of people with cancer or heart disease can have massive effects on the economy. If the Government is concerned about making investments for the long-term benefit of health, then simply concentrating on cutting waiting lists is not the solution. A bit more R&D investment could have immense benefits in terms of the ordinary work of the health service.

So, to answer your question, one has to argue forcibly, strongly and rationally with convincing evidence about the value of investment in research – and I shall be doing just that.”

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An electronic version of *re:*search is available at: www.bristol.ac.uk/university/publications/research

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*re:*search No 6
March 2004
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