

MEDIA RELEASE

5th March, 2018

Centenary Institute COO says workplaces need to be flexible to retain talented female scientists, ahead of International Women's Day Symposium.

When Dr Nick Pearce started working at the Centenary Institute, 27 years ago, there were few female scientists in the laboratories, let alone in leadership positions. Now, more women than ever are studying science at University and entering research careers, but these promising numbers are still not being reflected at faculty and leadership positions in medical research institutes.

This is something the Chief Operating Officer and Centenary's Gender Equity Program is successfully changing. Since being established three years ago, the Committee has introduced new awards, opportunities and speaking engagements for women, improved maternity and paternity leave and flexibility and support for women returning to work after having children, "My goal is to support all staff, male and female. It is a concern at medical research institutes, that there is a significant misrepresentation of men at the higher levels. I believe it's important for all senior leaders to ensure that opportunities exist for men and women, fixing the imbalances of the past," says Dr Pearce.

Workplaces must be flexible with hours and arrangements for staff, particularly for parents, in order to retain talented female scientists, making it easier for them to return to work and fulfil family responsibilities. This benefits women, men and science in general, "If you have a happy workforce, you have a productive one," says Dr Pearce.

As a mentor in the inaugural Franklin Women's Mentoring Program, Dr Pearce has been able to see up close, the obstacles women face in science. The program aims to give promising young females the confidence and knowledge to rise to the top of their field with the support of male and female mentors over a six-month period.

With just 14 per cent of research grants now being accepted by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC), both men and women face rejection in science, but women will often lack the confidence to persist, "Young female scientists will conclude that they're 'not good enough' or they 'don't have enough experience' while men don't have the same concerns." This confidence may be well justified, with studies finding subconscious bias favours male scientists. "It's not true that men are any more capable than women in science," says Dr Pearce.

Sydney University's Dr Emily Colvin was Dr Pearce's mentee. She now has a clear, achievable career plan in place, "This program definitely helped to build my confidence as a female scientist to now take more initiative with developing my career. There was a big focus throughout the program on developing our signature strengths, and discussing these with Nick at our mentoring sessions definitely helped me to realise I had skills that allow me to make a unique and worthwhile contribution to the scientific community," says Dr Colvin.

International Women's Day at the Centenary Institute - Mini-Symposium 'Leave no woman behind'

International Women's Day on Thursday 8th March is a global celebration of women's achievements across all fields of endeavour, as well as a call for action towards gender parity. The Centenary Gender Equity Program is hosting a symposium featuring talented male and female scientists and support staff in support of IWD 2018. They will highlight the ongoing challenges faced by women in science and tackle how progress can be made towards gender parity. The United Nation's International Women's Day was established to accelerate progress in meeting the needs and supporting the careers of girls and women around the world. This is an issue Centenary is passionate about, from the top down.

The Centenary Institute invites staff and students of our affiliated institutes, universities and collaborators to attend the Symposium, supporting a more balanced and prosperous future for medical research.

#IWD2018 #PressforProgress

Speakers:

Dr Hui Emma Zhang: Research Officer, Liver Injury and Cancer Program

Lauren Wilson: Animal Technician, Science Support

Nick Keilar: Grants Manager, Science Support

Dr Jessamy Tiffen: Research Officer, Melanoma Oncology and Immunology Program

Dr Angelina Lay: Senior Research Officer, Molecular Hepatology Laboratory

Panelists:

Dr Jodie Ingles: Associate Faculty, Molecular Cardiology Program

Professor Mark Gorrell: Faculty, Molecular Hepatology Laboratory

Lisa Shaw: Research Assistant, Immune Imaging Program

Dr Bernadette Saunders: Director of Postgraduate Coursework Programs, University of Technology Sydney

Natasha Yung: Risk and Compliance Officer, Science Support

What: Centenary Institute Inaugural International Women's Day Symposium

When: Thursday 8th March, 2pm-4pm

Where: Centenary Institute lecture theatre, Building 93, Royal Prince Alfred Hospital Missenden Rd (follow Johns Hopkins Drive), Camperdown.

Contact: To arrange interviews and for access on the day, please contact Karen McBrien, Marketing Manager: 9565 6100, k.mcbrien@centenary.org.au or 0408 601 836.

For more information about Centenary Institute, visit www.centenary.org.au