



8 September 1997

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER
THE HON JOHN HOWARD MP
ADDRESS AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF
THE CENTENARY INSTITUTE RESEARCH FACILITY
CAMPERDOWN, SYDNEY**

E&OE.....

To Mr Ken Tribe, Professor Tony Basten, the Deputy Premier of New South Wales, Andrew Refshauge, my other Federal and State Parliamentary colleagues. In particular I acknowledge the presence of two former health ministers in this State, Peter Collins and Ron Phillips, to all the other distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

I am delighted to be here today for a number of reasons. I am delighted to have the honour of officially opening this very fine Institute. I play no part in interstate rivalry. But let me simply say, I enthusiastically embrace yet another milestone in the remarkable medical research story of Australia.

On a day when we celebrate, with very good reason, a great sporting triumph by an Australian, it's important to remind ourselves that we have won many world championships in medical research. And we have a remarkable example of that here today with Professor Peter Doherty. He's a very important link and he's a very important symbol of what this country has achieved in the field of medical research.

This Centenary Institute will take its place alongside the Walter and Eliza Hall, the John Curtin School, the Garvan, the Howard Florey Institute, as yet another manifestation of the commitment of both governments and private enterprise to the cause of medical research in Australia.

And I don't want to let the opportunity go by without very warmly thanking those companies that have given so very generously, particularly, CSL and News Limited. You need a partnership between the Government and the community to make a reality of institutes such as this. The Government can't do it all, although it ought to do a lot, and the community and the private sector can't do it all, although it ought to play a part. And my old friend, Ken Tribe, has reminded me - people do it quite a lot lately - about the foibles of the present taxation system. And I can assure you, Ken, that I will take that on board and it will, in the language of reform, be fed into the process. I'm

sure that over the next few months I'll get a lot of advice about the weaknesses of the current Australian taxation system.

As Ken acknowledged, the Centenary Institute grew out of one of the first of 10 centres of excellence that were established by the Fraser Government in 1982. And I do remember the Cabinet discussion that took place. I recall, in particular, that it was the recommendation of the then Health Minister, Jim Carlton, that we establish a number of centres of excellence around Australia. And the whole idea of them was to ultimately produce institutes of this kind and to encourage world-class, trail-blazing research.

And this, as has been stated already, this Institute will focus on world-class research in cancer, tuberculosis, multiple sclerosis, diabetes and asthma. There's barely a person or a family in Australia who's not, at some stage - or some member of that family - who's not touched by one of those diseases or one of those afflictions. And, therefore, the investment by the Government and by the private sector in this Institute is an investment in the current and future good health of the entire population.

We do have a magnificent record in medical research. With a small population of only 18 million, we contribute two per cent of the total medical research around the world. And through that, we're able to share in the other 98 per cent.

The medical scientific output in Australia is very meritorious. About 45 per cent of the published research work is in the medical-scientific field, despite the fact that medical research receives only 15 per cent of the total research contribution from governments. And the institutes, and this is one of them, can take an enormous amount of credit for that superb exercise in leveraging that proportion into a much higher percentage of the research output.

The Federal Government has contributed \$7.7 million on a dollar-for-dollar basis with the New South Wales Government towards the total funding cost of the Institute. As well as that, it's contributed \$7.69 million since 1990 towards various research projects, which is a very significant contribution out of the research budget. And I should acknowledge the commitment of the former Federal Government, under both of my two predecessors, towards supporting this Institute and towards supporting medical research in Australia.

And I'm also pleased to say today that we will contribute a further \$100 000 to assist in setting up the newest research laboratory in the Institute.

Our commitment to medical research in Australia is a very strong and ongoing one. In 1997 the Federal Government will contribute a total, through the NHMRC, of \$160 million towards medical research in Australia.

I've spoken a lot, ladies and gentlemen, in recent weeks about the importance of Australia realising her potential as we move as a nation into the 21st Century. And realising that potential as a nation is not only an economic goal, and not only is it something that has an economic dimension, and it's not just something that has a political or a strategic dimension, but it's also a goal that is realised when the talents of the Australian people are properly mobilised. And one of the great talents that the

Australian nation has always had is a remarkable capacity for medical research. Our qualities in the area of medical treatment and medical science are, in my view, without peer around the world.

We talk a lot about exports out of this country. Our capacity and potential to export medical science, medical excellence, is, I believe, one that will take its place amongst all the other areas where we will perform well as an exporting nation. We have always had wonderful doctors. We've always had first-class hospitals. We've always had very dedicated nurses and very dedicated volunteers.

The medical infrastructure in Australia has always been a remarkable, almost unique, combination of the Government, the medical profession, the private sector and the volunteer. It has obviously changed over the years and there will obviously be intense and ongoing debate about the type of health system that this country ought to have. And today is not the occasion to add to the dimension of that debate in any kind of partisan way.

But merely, on behalf of the Federal Government and, I'm sure, on behalf of the people of Australia, it's an opportunity for me to say thank you to the medical research community of Australia. It's an opportunity for me to congratulate Professor Basten and his colleagues on the work that they have done here at the Institute over the last 15 to 20 years, to salute the extraordinary achievements of Australians over the last 100 or more years in the area of medical science. It is something of which we should be immensely proud. Peter Doherty is but the latest example in a long line of Australians who have put this country on the map and in the process made a magnificent contribution to relieving the suffering of humanity, not only here in Australia, but around the world.

We often hear balance sheets of human progress and human failure over the last couple of generations. Any balance sheet of human progress over the last couple of generations will tell us that there is no area of human endeavour where there has been more success than in the area of medical science and medical research. The unbelievable progress that has been made in that area, all around the world, is something that ought to give us, as human beings, part of the human race, an immense amount of pride. And Australia has played an enormous role in that. And at the centre of those activities have been the sort of people that have done their research work and made their discoveries and reached their achievements in the institutes. I'm therefore very proud, indeed, to have been invited to formally open the Centenary Institute.

I thank all of those again who have contributed so generously. I salute the intelligence and the commitment and the human dedication of those who work in the Institute. And I'm very proud that the Government I lead - and formerly, a government of which I was a part - has played such an important role in supporting such a magnificent contribution towards medical science here in Australia and, I'm sure, around the world.

Thank you.