



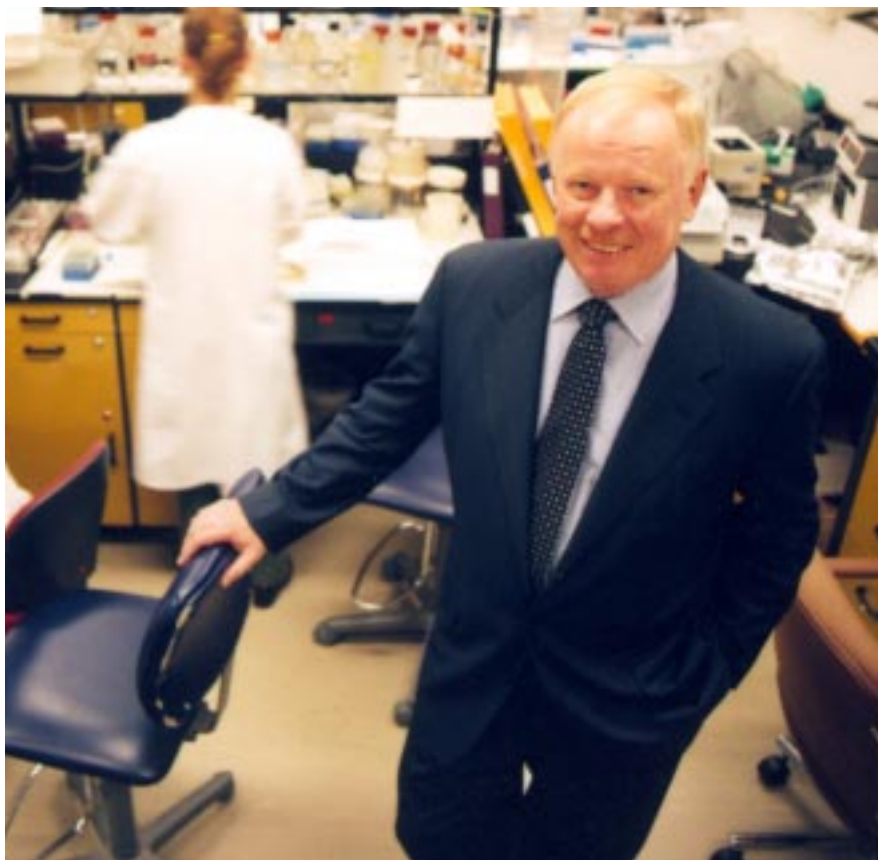
The immune system never sleeps, and neither does CAN

FOR PRESIDENT AND CEO Chris Nelson, an organization like the Canadian Arthritis Network functions very much along the lines of the human immune system. We tend to pay attention to the body's defences when they are busy fighting a disease, but we can easily overlook the fact that they are active all the time.

"As the network's own researchers have helped us understand, a complex structure like the body's immune system is constantly adapting itself to new conditions," he says. "It's constantly confronting challenges and solving problems even before the rest of the body is aware of them. The process is one of ongoing renewal."

Vibrant organizations like CAN are in a similar state of ongoing renewal. Nelson regards this description as an appropriate way of appreciating the changes that we are going to see in the network over the coming months and years.

"We have evolved from where we were when the network was first created," he says. "People initially took part for a variety of reasons, if only to make sure they kept abreast of who else in Canada was working in their field.



Canadian Arthritis Network President and CEO Chris Nelson

But now, thanks to the activities that have been undertaken by these same people, we find ourselves setting new goals and new priorities."

This updated strategy includes building a secure funding base for the network. Throughout the rest of this year, all research grants are being reviewed with an eye toward identifying potential commercial partnerships.

"One of the principal reasons the network was created was to ensure that

Canada develops and retains a body of highly qualified personnel in this area," says Nelson. With that end in mind, CAN remains committed to building an outstanding research infrastructure to cultivate and attract such personnel.

Moreover, a service-oriented staff should enhance the reputation and quality of network activities. This administrative advantage will also facilitate collaboration with organizations that have a similar

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vision, whether they be in Canada or elsewhere.

Nelson points out that organization change is not merely a reaction to changing political or economic conditions. It consists of well-coordinated phases that are controlled from within. More specifically, there are four distinct steps:

1. **Forming** – asking basic questions about who you are as an organization, as well as what you want;
2. **Storming** – the dynamic challenges and conflicts that arise when people within an organization are asked to change;
3. **Norming** – installing a new efficiency and vision to the organization, so that its members can become productive;
4. **Performing** – the restoration of a renewed status quo.



“CAN is bound to thrive as a result of this renewal,” says Nelson. “We have surveyed where we are and where we’re going. Now we’re beginning to act on this through concrete measures, such as defining and communicating the responsibilities and rewards of CAN membership.”

And rather than worrying about the uncertainties of this process, he suggests considering the valuable example we already know. “There may be uncertainties associated with the way the immune system goes about its business,” he says. “But the one certainty is that its steady progress is your best bet for staying healthy.” ■

On Groucho, membership and the power of association

“I don’t want to belong to any club that will accept me as a member,” said Groucho Marx.

AND INDEED, MANY OF US prefer to associate with organizations regarded as being a cut above — perhaps even a cut above where we imagine ourselves belonging.

Nevertheless, in the world of medical

few examples of the many dimensions of CAN’s membership landscape. Integrating people from industry and government institutions, universities and hospitals, as well as consumer organizations, it would be hard not to establish

Academic			Consumers	Industry, government, charities, others
Investigators	Trainees	Participating institutions	Consumers	Affiliate members
Member eligible for CAN research funds.	CAN trainee trainee program awardees (grads, fellows).	Host institution. Academic institutions that have signed the NCE Network Agreement.	Consumer Advisory Council	The Arthritis Society
CAN scholarship awardees.	Past trainee program awardees.	OGSST – CAN awardees.	Canadian Arthritis Patient Alliance	Institute of Musculoskeletal Health and Arthritis
	Trainees funded through operational grants.			Pharmaceutical companies
				Biotech companies
				Government

research and development, there is strength not just in numbers, but also in diversity. The Canadian Arthritis Network is dedicated to these qualities, assembling expertise and resources that represent the best of what the country’s research community has to offer. All are welcome and all are necessary, including those who feel it is a club that would even accept them as a member.

“It means different things to different people,” says Chris McCulloch, Chair of CAN’s membership committee. “If you’re an experienced, lead investigator, membership can give you a broad view of the talent that may be available for you to employ or partner with. If you’re a junior faculty person looking to make good, the network may open up opportunities for you to develop new skills or find matching funds to support your position.”

Moreover, he adds, these are just a

invaluable liaisons through the network.

In fact, CAN was renewed as a Network of Centres of Excellence because it had demonstrated scientific and institutional leadership, strong management and the virtues of bringing together committed members from across Canada. Those who take part have a chance to be at the forefront of high calibre, relevant medical investigation, with access to technology and funding that might otherwise be more difficult to obtain.

It all adds up to the power of association, something that characterizes modern science and technology. Sharing ideas and providing information through a centralized body like CAN is second nature to anyone with experience in a research enterprise. And the benefits of doing so quickly become obvious to any experienced researcher, as well as curmudgeons like Groucho. ■

CAN Scientific program and opportunities for strategic collaboration with industry



Robin Poole
Ph.D., D.Sc.
Scientific Director

CAN is creating a fertile ground for innovation by bringing the best and the brightest together to share knowledge, skills and ideas.

RESEARCHERS IN OSTEOPOROSIS are now working on osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis to study the poorly investigated aspects of bone damage and change in arthritis.

Following a mid-term review of CAN's goals and funding priorities, the R&D committee is taking a broader perspective in dealing with specific unmet needs in arthritis research.

The special research initiative (SRI) will establish more fully integrated disease-based national research programs that combine and cut across existing research themes and pillars of research (basic, clinical, health services and outcomes and population studies) in order to fulfill unmet needs. This approach will begin with a SRI in osteoarthritis, which has been identified by CAN as a major unmet need. This will be conducted in partnership with The Arthritis Society (TAS) and the Institute of Musculoskeletal Health and Arthritis (IMHA).

As part of this strategy, members are invited to respond by submitting a letter of intent (LOI). Submitted proposals may include research already funded by CAN. Research will include activities such as clinical or pre-clinical studies, technology and drug development, as well as new basic or clinical research that will be necessary to complement existing research programs.

The timeline for the request for applications (RFA) process for the SRI is as follows:



July 5, 2002

Release of the 'SRI in osteoarthritis' RFA.

November 15, 2002

Deadline for receipt of Letter(s) of Intent, followed by a full review of these submissions.

December 15, 2002

Notification to those invited to submit full applications, as well to unsuccessful applicants.

February 28, 2003

Notice of intent to submit full proposal.

March 31, 2003

Deadline for submission of full project OA proposal(s) for subsequent review by Scientific Medical Advisory Council.

May 1, 2003

Notification of award and year of award by CAN.

June 1, 2003

Approved proposals begin.

The SRI strongly encourages members to seek matching funds from industry, government and other potential research partners. Such partnerships, which are part of CAN's mandate, can identify new funding opportunities and new areas of unmet need. In this way, participants can take part in an evolving R&D culture led by CAN in Canada and around the world, in partnership with TAS and IMHA.

Those interested in partnering in the osteoarthritis and other national initiatives should contact the Scientific Director or the President to discuss the opportunities for collaborative research and generation of intellectual property and new ways of managing OA. ■

Adding to the diversity of CAN training initiatives

CAN has set a high priority on offering support to the latest generation of researchers, including graduate students and post doctoral fellows.



SOME OF THAT SUPPORT, SUCH as the Network Scholarship Award, requires matching funds from eligible partners. In other cases, such as training awards, preference still goes to applicants who can identify a funding partner, but exceptional candidates may now receive a full stipend.

Starting with the competition that opened at the end of May, a limited number of these full stipends have become available. For details on how to apply for any of these awards, consult the training section of the CAN Web site, www.arthritisnetwork.ca/ta.asp

CAN is actively seeking the best possible research trainees, as well as the best training opportunities. If your laboratory or clinic has openings that would be suitable for this kind of activity, please let us know. Your institution will soon be contacted by the network, as we assemble information about these positions for publication in this newsletter or on our Web site. In the meantime, we are distributing posters announcing the availability of our training awards, which we invite you to display wherever it will catch the eye of your most promising new talent. ■



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