

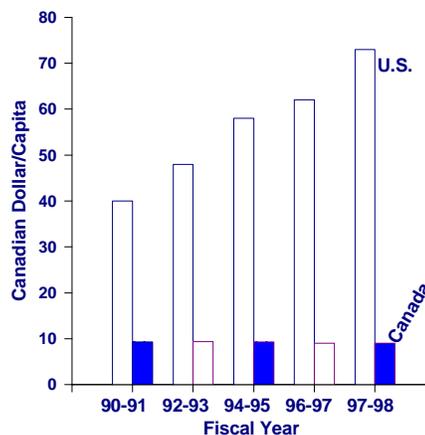
EDITORIAL

Funding for Canadian Biomedical Research – a Ray of Hope!

A young academic staff member at the University of Saskatchewan recently sought my opinion regarding a job offer he had just received from an American university. The position was in an attractive southern California location with a salary of over \$73,000 U.S -- quite a jump from his present \$51,000 Canadian (i.e., \$34,000 U.S.). “More spending money in an attractive climate -- what is to hesitate about?” I responded. He replied that “it is not the money and it is not the nicer location, it is the hopelessness of the Canadian academic careers in biomedical disciplines that makes me leave.” This is sad but true, and the resultant brain drain is a serious problem, particularly serious for competitive disciplines at pharmacy schools.

Recruitment and retention of talented individuals have become hopeless tasks. The major concern is the lack of success in attaining or maintaining research grants. There is simply not enough money in the system! After many years of cuts, in 1997-1998, the Canadian federal government modestly increased the Medical Research Council (MRC) budget so that it is now only at the 1994-95 level. This is still the lowest (per capita spending) among the industrialized countries. And so, the brain drain continues, the loss of our young talented people – our hope for the future.

The National Institute of Health (NIH) and MRC, are the major sources of funding for independent biomedical research in the United States of America and Canada, respectively. While the NIH budget is \$73/capita (in Canadian dollars) and still growing, the Canadian MRC receives only \$9/capita. With this poor record of support, should we, in all good conscience, encourage our youth to commit themselves to research careers in Canada?



Trends of Canadian MRC and the U.S. NIH per capita budgets in the 90's

Fortunately, the declining trend in MRC budgets may have come to an end. But, is this sufficient to revitalize the badly needed academic R&D in Canada? Certainly not, but, there is a ray of hope. It appears that the Canadian government is planning to earmark an additional \$500 million/year for independent biomedical research. This is a sizable increase, considering that the entire MRC budget is presently only \$267 million. Henry Friesen, president of the MRC, and Alan Rock, the Federal Health Minister, have been discussing approaches to improve the MRC funding. Is this a sign of change? Let's hope so. We must all be supportive of the initiative. And let us hope that the MRC encourages participation of Canadian biomedical scientists of all disciplines in its budget allocation strategy.

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Editor