

KIRBY INSTITUTE

ANNUAL REPORT 2017

MESSAGE FROM OUR PATRON

The Hon. Michael Kirby AC CMG

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This annual report for the year 2017 must start with the great blow that was suffered by the Kirby Institute in the early weeks of 2018. Institutes and human beings are tested in times of challenge. The year 2017, and its immediate aftermath, have been such times.

The death of the inaugural Director of the Institute, Professor David Cooper AC, was a huge blow. It was larger because of the fact that David Cooper had been present at the creation. He helped steer the Institute during frightening, dangerous and uncertain times of blood borne diseases, and especially the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), in Australia and worldwide. To have at the helm a person who was not only a brilliant and creative scientist but also a passionate physician, a natural leader and a kind and creative man, meant that his death was a shock. It was unexpected. It followed closely the happy celebration of the Institute's 30th anniversary year.

The year 2017 opened with praise heaped upon us and the provision of renewed funding; and great expectations of important new challenges and adventures with applied and pure science. It was at that time that Professor Cooper fell ill. We all expected him to revive. With such a

charismatic figure, we expected him soon to be back at his desk and in the laboratory. Then on 18 March 2018 came the news of his death.

I pay a tribute to the courage and strength of David's wife, Dorrie and his daughters Becky and Ilana. We held their hands. As they held ours.

The huge space of the Sydney Town Hall was filled with scientists and citizens from Australia and overseas on 14 June 2018. At the World AIDS Conference in Amsterdam that quickly followed I was invited to speak to the global community of an Australian scientist who had really mattered in the epidemiology of AIDS. It was a painful time.

Yet, we have got through those hard days. The Kirby Institute kept doing what it is best at. And what David Cooper demanded of it. It kept working with professional skill on the problems of infection and immunity. This was what the professionalism of the Institute's staff demanded. It is what David Cooper would have expected. Equally important, it was what discipline and dedication for the patients and the tasks in hand demanded. Without delay a management committee was formed. It comprised the scientific leaders of the Kirby Institute whom we had seen honoured and respected by colleagues from around the world. A search was promptly initiated to find our new Director. The new Director will, we are sure, come with new ideas and fresh energy. This is the way of the world. In striving for this goal, the Kirby Institute and the University of New South Wales are jointly dedicated.

Many research and other achievements of 2017 can be remembered and celebrated:

- * The Lord Mayor of Sydney (Councillor Clover Moore) presented the Kirby Institute with the Key to the City of Sydney: the highest honour that could be conferred on an individual organisation;
- * Encouraged by research at the Kirby Institute, treatment for Hepatitis C infection was made available under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme to put Australia on track to cure Hepatitis C in our nation;
- * A report in the *Medical Journal of Australia* showed a marked drop in genital warts amongst young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander citizens, an area that has had the special attention of the Kirby Institute;
- * The Institute's research stimulated the provision of new and more effective HIV treatment through the United States PEPFAR Program;
- * Researchers of the Kirby Institute conducted the first evaluation of a point of care Hepatitis C test, to detect any active infection from a finger stick sample of blood;
- * A research collaboration between the Kirby Institute and medical scientists in Myanmar promoted a new emphasis on the work against HIV, Tuberculosis and Malaria in that country. Others have followed; and
- * The Kirby Institute's "Opposites Attract" study affirmed that HIV positive men, conforming to ART treatment, do not transmit HIV to their sexual partners.

These achievements of 2017 were soon to be recognised in the following year by outstanding funding awards to the Kirby Institute personnel in 2018. These awards will be listed with pride in the next Annual Report.

But they can be heralded here as an indication that a corner has been turned. The innovative work of the Kirby Institute goes on with renewed zeal. Times of loss and mourning are now behind us. The greatest legacy of David Cooper will be the ongoing and increasing success of the Kirby Institute: undaunted, strong, resilient.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael Kirby". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent dot above the 'i' in "Kirby".

Michael Kirby

Patron of the Kirby Institute