



ATA Scientific – Travel Award Second Prize Winner, Jan 2012

Mr Ivan Wong (PhD student, School of Biotechnology and Biomolecular Sciences, The University of New South Wales)

Dear Minister,

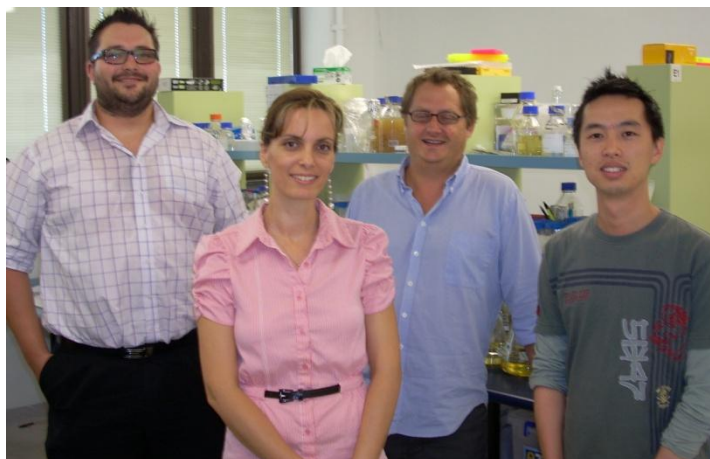
Our laboratory deserves a million dollar research grant because.....

there is a lack of scientific research funding in this country. In 2011, the federal government passed significant budget cuts on research grants. Yet, despite much more difficult budgetary circumstances than Australia, both US President Barack Obama and British Prime Minister David Cameron have protected research funding. This is on top of their many substantial private sources of funding such as the Melinda and Bill Gates Foundation.

Australia prides itself on scientific excellence in the Asia-Pacific region and is a leader of innovation in the world. However, we may start to see our scientific presence in Asia-Pacific start to diminish as China and India ramp up their research initiatives, in addition to the strong tradition powerhouses including Singapore, South Korea and Japan. Australia's past major discoveries include the cochlear implant – the Bionic Ear, world's first anti-flu drug – Relenza and human papillomavirus vaccine – Gardasil. However, these notable discoveries are few and far between. Unless political attitudes start to change and acknowledge scientific excellence and discovery with more funding, Australia's next generation of scientists will struggle to meet the excellence set by our Nobel laureates.

Most young scientists have completed 10 years of study and training, including a Bachelor's degree with honours, a Masters degrees and a PhD before they can apply for one of the most competitive grants in the country. Reducing financial support and research funding will set young scientists back financially compared to their age cohort with a different career. This will lead to less science undergraduate students in future and it will be disappointing to see bright young Australian scientists move abroad to pursue discoveries and excellence elsewhere. Our latest Nobel laureate in Medicine, Elizabeth Blackburn, is now based in San Francisco after a lack of support from Australia. It would improve our research and discoveries to have the top scientists back in Australia teaching and mentoring the next generation of Nobel laureates.

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PhD Student Ivan Wong and Prof Brett Neilan, UNSW School of Biotechnology and Biomolecular Science.