

**CIHR President (Rod McInnes) @ Western
June 19, 2017, 10:00am—11:40am**

3 priorities

1. Peer review
2. CIHR Institutes
3. SPOR

1. Peer Review

reform system impossible to make work

cost more—\$500,000 more

no reason to continue reforms

return to project grant classical scheme—panels etc

online system tried at NIH, at the MRC in the UK, in both case abandoned, it didn't work

virtues of in-person panels

perceived weakness of panels—old boys/girls in-group dominates each field

lots of challenges with in-person panels but it's the best system we have

multidisciplinary grants: ad-hoc clusters worked better

was one of the motivations for the reforms

but actual proportion of grants that are truly multidisciplinary is unknown

upcoming competition (registration in mid-August) will likely be all in-person panels in the old style

after this next competition CIHR will look carefully at how to better handle multidisciplinary grants

2. CIHR Institutes

play an important role

refocus RFAs

remove some rules/constraints to allow better strategic RFAs incl. multi-institute initiatives

3. SPOR

research related to policy and decision-makers

a lot of problems—not clear who the leaders are

needs to be looked at and carefully reviewed

agnostic about SPOR but needs a careful look, lots of noise but not much actual information

Question Period

Personnel awards?

They all need to be re-examined. Hope there will be funds to bring all the good ones back. Need a rethink of MD/PhD programs & awards—a subspecies of investigators that the world needs.

Foundation vs Project. Will we sustain both? Shift funds from Foundation back to Project?

Foundation scheme has a number of challenges—a lot of money in it. Project system needs more money. Putting ECIs into Foundation scheme is contrary to its original vision. Many people saying we should abandon Foundation. He's not sure but it should probably be downsized substantially. On the other hand best Canadian researchers often can't compete internationally with scientists who are funded so well. Foundation needs to be smaller. Funding ECIs through Foundation doesn't make sense. Don't allow ECIs to apply for Foundation. Move some money over from Foundation to Project. Equalize success rates for ECIs in Project scheme.

For ECIs with Foundation awards—how to roll out without experiencing funding lapses?

Perhaps allow ECIs to start applying to Project scheme early in their Foundation award.

A suggestion that to handle multidisciplinary grants, use SEPs as NIH does.

Dr. McInnes doesn't seem to know about Special Emphasis Panels (SEPs) at NIH. One approach might be when the Chair & SO doesn't think a grant quite fits, recruit additional reviewers to the panel who have the expertise.

Will there be more transparency brought back into review panels? Particularly F-Scheme?

Everything that was wrong with P-scheme review was also wrong with F-scheme review.

General Comment from McInnes: He knows all of us got crazy reviews but let's not let that influence investigators' careers. Institutions (Universities) must step up and support researchers who got a bum ride.

With upcoming Project scheme, and return to traditional panels, can applicants write for the culture of the panels they used to write for?

McInnes says he thinks there's an undue emphasis on writing grants for the particular individuals on a given panel. He says any scientist in general recognizes "good science" from "not good science". Having said that he can't see why we can't indicate who's going to be on panels before application submission.

Also: We will allow applicants to choose which panel their grant should go to. Panels will be largely unchanged from the OOGP three years ago.

Are you expecting a flood of applications and how to prepare for it?

Modelling at about 3000 to 3500 Project applications for the next competition. Will split panels if they need to. Now: recruiting Chairs and SOs from past OOGP competitions. Asking researchers to re-dedicate themselves to the system. Building up the panels with experienced researchers from OOGP system. Have the Chairs and the SOs lead the process of constituting panels.

Why don't we have Program Officers, who are PhD level researchers, like at the NIH?

They cost a lot of money.

How to ensure that bi-directional flow of information between CIHR and researchers continues?

Via the CIHR Institutes, or the University delegates.

How to we ensure that return to OOGP doesn't adversely affect multidisciplinary grants?

We still need to figure that out. No time to create something novel for the upcoming competition. Spring competition next year we might start "trying things".

Can you give us some thoughts on strategic initiatives? Very pock-marked landscape with disorganized initiatives. Naylor report suggests return to broader base funding not strategic initiatives. Evidence from NIH is strategic initiatives underperform investigator initiated grants.
Naylor report wasn't talking about Institutes budgets. Not true that there's no place for strategic funding. There's an important role for strategic funding. E.g. genome project. Wasn't aware of the report questioner mentioned about strategic initiatives underperforming investigator-initiated grants. An important question: how many CIHR Institutes should there be? Total budget is also a consideration. If we get proper funding levels e.g. 20% in the open competition, a lot of this concern will melt away. Having said that, special tranches of money from the government for specific research areas, instead of the open competition, should be a concern for all of us.

Idea of Reform Project Scheme was very focused, discrete project with concrete deliverables. OOGP was more programmatic. What are we doing going forward with P scheme?

He doesn't know what the rationale for the reform P-Scheme was. Going forward, project grants should simply address an important question. McInnes didn't really understand the distinction the questioner was making. CIHR is going back to the old panel system, mainly.

Change in format and structure of grants was very challenging. What to expect going forward? Will the format be durable and have stability going forward?

Will be a 10-page application, unstructured, as in most recent competition. Two-page response to previous reviews. They're looking at ability to add previous reviews to new application. Will be able to add additional attachments. Will be able to select your committee. Looks a lot like OOGP application.

What are your thoughts about SPOR? Where are you going with SPOR?

SPOR in conception sounds brilliant, in execution has problems. Too complex for me (McInnes) to fully understand. Nobody even knows who's in charge. Naylor report: SPOR is ill-conceived and shouldn't be within CIHR. McInnes has asked a group of scientific directors to be the lead group for management and review of SPOR. Will start the process of figuring out where to go with SPOR. Potentially massively important, but unclear whether it should be within or outside CIHR. Going to take well into the next president's term to decide what direction SPOR should go.

One of the problems in the past with peer review has been a lack of appropriate expertise in reviewers. NIH is good at it because they have phenomenal expertise on their panels. What's the answer? Is there a mechanism to tap into US & International expertise?

We ought to get the best panels we can, admittedly harder in a smaller country like Canada compared to the USA. We can't afford to bring in many non-Canadians. Maybe we should expand the size of panels beyond 12 people, to get more expertise.

Vision of CIHR about international research initiatives?

Needs a careful look. Can't not have international initiatives. Haven't had a careful look yet.

CIHR president in a unique position to lobby for increased federal funding to CIHR, especially in light of the Naylor Report. What are you doing in this regard? Is there reason to be optimistic? What can research community do to lobby federal government?

All three tri-council agencies are in agreement with Naylor Report. McInnes is “very optimistic” that there will be a positive response. Ultimately decision made by finance minister, prime minister, etc. What do to? Not make up a form letter that thousands of people sign. Should: write to Jane Philpott and cc to Prime Minister, make it personal, say what your contribution has been, employed this many people, etc, and run through what the negative impact of low funding has been over past 10 years. Make the case that research is important for Canada.