

# SIR ZELMAN COWEN UNIVERSITIES FUND

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## Alzheimer's disease and Inflammation Initiative

*Finding the knowledge which will relieve the suffering .....*

### Information Leaflet

*The hardest thing in medical science - in any science - is to ask the right question ....*

The **Sir Zelman Cowen Universities Fund** is a charitable trust established in 1978 by the Sydney businessman John Hammond. It has donated over \$3 million for medical research at the University of Sydney and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

The Trustees recognise the importance of basic research for advances in medicine. Prevention, treatment and cure all require knowledge and understanding, often at the fundamental levels of cells and molecules. This requires long-term research, and the Fund seeks wherever possible to distribute funds to laboratories involved in such research, through a peer-reviewed Grants Program.

To provide the advice needed for such a Program, in 1995 a Scientific Advisory Committee was established. Its members include Professor Max Bennett B Eng, D Sc, FAA, Emeritus Professor Liam Burke BSc PhD, Professor Bogdan Dreher DSc and Dr John Mc Avoy PhD of the University of Sydney, and Professor Ian Mc Closkey FAA, FTS, FRACP, Director of the Prince of Wales Medical Research Institute.

All grants made by the Fund are disbursed to the University of Sydney for projects nominated by the Fund's Trustees at both Universities

**The Alzheimer's Disease and Inflammation (ADI) Initiative** is a peer-reviewed program of research commissioned by the Fund as a major initiative to lay the scientific base for a treatment of Alzheimer's disease (AD). AD is a progressive, age-related disorder of the brain leading to dementia. The disease is still untreatable and its progress relentless. It causes enormous suffering to older people in Australia as in every nation. It is among the diseases of key interest to the Fund's Trustees.

In 1995 the Fund's Scientific Advisory Committee reviewed evidence from American and European groups that chronic, low-level inflammation plays a major role in the destruction of cerebral neurons, which causes the dementia of AD. This evidence suggested that anti-inflammatory drugs protect against AD, that inflammation of cerebral tissue correlates better with the dementia of AD than the classical markers of AD (plaques and tangles) and that anti-inflammatory drugs can halt the progress of the disease. Although this evidence was only a small part of the research literature on AD, much of which concerns the molecular biology of proteins prominent in AD (tau, -amyloid, apolipoprotein E), the Committee judged the evidence of great interest and a Working Party of scientists was convened. In early 1996, the Trustees approved recommendations from the Scientific Advisory Committee to fund projects submitted by the Working Party to assess the role of inflammation in Alzheimer's disease in Australia. The *ADI Initiative* had been launched.

The Working Party was convened by Professor Stone, and comprised of Professor Tony Broe and Dr William Brooks from the Centre for Education and Research on Aging at Concord Hospital, Dr Glenda Halliday from the Prince of Wales Medical Research Institute, Drs Jillian Kril and Phillip Penfold of the University of Sydney and Dr. Peter Schofield of the Garvan Institute. During 1996

the Working Party pursued projects in the epidemiology and neuropathology of AD, and laboratory studies of the cerebral inflammatory processes. These studies aimed to assess the protective role of anti-inflammatory drugs on the occurrence and progress of the correlation between inflammatory processes and the clinical signs of AD, and to identify the 'killer cells' which cause the dementia of AD and characterize their response to anti-inflammatory drugs.

The Working Party has since reported regularly, first in March 1997, on *The role of inflammation in Alzheimer's Disease: the Australian experience*. A list of further publications which have resulted from this Initiative can be found at [www.szcuf.org.usyd.edu.au](http://www.szcuf.org.usyd.edu.au) together with reports on the work of the Initiative in our Newsletters and the *ADI Report 2001*.

The Initiative continues. It is our hope that the Initiative will ultimately lay the scientific basis essential to justify substantial clinical trials.

Because the evidence is already intriguing and the results from both here and overseas are very promising, and because anti-inflammatory drugs are available in numbers and their side effects well delineated, there is every chance that this Initiative will yield major fruit, that at last there will be treatment to prevent the onset of the disease, and to stop its progress where it has begun.

There is every chance that, this time, we have found the right question. If we give now, to the *Alzheimer's disease and Inflammation Initiative* .....

.. then maybe we can all forget about it.

To make a tax-deductible donation to the Fund, complete the slip below and mail it to the Fund.

#### Sir Zelman Cowen Universities Fund

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