

**OPENING REMARKS BY DR TONY TAN KENG YAM, CHAIRMAN
OF NATIONAL RESEARCH FOUNDATION, AT THE CANCER
SCIENCE INSTITUTE OF SINGAPORE 1ST ANNIVERSARY
CONFERENCE: FRONTIERS IN CANCER SCIENCE ON 16
NOVEMBER 2009 AT 9.25AM AT THE NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF
SINGAPORE**

**Professor Tan Chorh Chuan
President
National University of Singapore**

**Prof Daniel Tenen
Saw Swee Hock Centennial Professor in Medical Sciences and
Director of the Cancer Science Institute of Singapore**

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

**I would like to first thank the Cancer Science Institute of Singapore
(CSI Singapore) for inviting me to officiate the inaugural conference,
“Frontiers in Cancer Science”, organized to mark the 1st anniversary of the
Institute.**

**CSI Singapore is one of a small number of Research Centres of Excellence
or RCEs jointly funded by the Ministry of Education and the National
Research Foundation.**

Research Centres of Excellence (RCE) Programme

As we move into an increasingly innovation-driven, knowledge-based economy, research and development is a key driver of growth for Singapore's economic development.

Singapore's universities are the country's best resource to generate new knowledge through R&D which can eventually lead to new industries.

In Singapore, as elsewhere, universities are thus assuming an increasingly greater role in research, innovation and enterprise development to enhance national economic competitiveness.

The objective of establishing the RCEs is to help enhance our universities' development as research-intensive universities.

They will then serve as magnets to nurture, attract and retain talent that is critical for the knowledge intensive phase of our national development.

Establishing RCEs is an important part of this strategy.

The Ministry of Education (MOE) and National Research Foundation have set aside \$750m to fund the establishment of up to five Research Centres of Excellence (RCEs).

The RCEs are expected to establish peaks of research excellence in distinct areas of science at our universities through world-class investigator-led research with global impact.

With R&D led by renowned scientists, each RCE would strive to be among the best in the world in its field of research within a decade of establishment.

The RCEs have three main aims:

- a) Attract, retain and support world-class academic investigators to perform high quality and high impact research in Singapore;**
- b) Enhance graduate education (and potentially undergraduate education) in the universities and train quality research manpower for Singapore; and**
- c) Create new knowledge in areas which are of strategic relevance to Singapore.**

The RCEs are located within the campuses of our universities and are affiliated to their host universities.

However, they are given autonomy and freedom in their operations, guided by their own Governing Boards.

Over the years, the RCE will also reinforce the network of research collaborations that Singapore has with top universities and research institutions around the world.

Progress of the RCE programme

The RCE programme has got off to a good start.

Since 2007, four RCEs have been established.

These were selected through a rigorous two-stage process involving MOE's Academic Research Council (ARC) headed by Professor Robert Brown, President of Boston University.

The first RCE was the Center for Quantum Technologies (CQT) at the National University of Singapore, led by Professor Artur Ekert from Oxford University.

The next two were the Cancer Science Institute of Singapore (CSI Singapore) and the Earth Observatory of Singapore (EOS), led respectively by Professor Daniel Tenan from the Harvard Medical School and Professor Kerry Sieh from the California Institute of Technology.

In Feb 09, the 4th RCE in Mechanobiology led by Professor Michael Sheetz from Columbia University with co-director Professor Paul Matsudaira, Head of the Department of Biological Sciences at NUS, was approved.

The ARC is now evaluating proposals submitted for the 5th RCE, and will make its recommendation by early 2010.

Review of the RCE Programme

The RCE Programme has in place a comprehensive framework of governance developed by the Academic Research Council when the programme was started.

Each RCE has a member of the ARC on its governing board.

The ARC has the responsibility to appraise the performance of each RCE on behalf of the MOE and NRF.

In addition, an International Review Panel (IRP) will be established by the MOE and NRF to provide independent feedback on the performance of the RCE, its director and PIs at regular intervals¹.

The findings and assessment of the IRP will be presented in the form of a report to the ARC for their deliberation and action.

Such periodic reviews of the RCEs are important to allow the MOE and NRF to appreciate the progress of each RCE and assess the impact it has achieved vis a vis the stated goals.

NRF has also embarked on a mid-term review of the other initiatives it has funded, including the three strategic research programmes started in 2006.

The review of the Interactive and Digital Media (IDM) programme was recently completed.

Before the end of the year, the other two programmes, namely the Biomedical Sciences – Translational & Clinical Research (BMS-TCR) programme and the Environmental and Water Technologies (EWT) Programme would also have completed their reviews.

¹ The first IRP review will take place in the 3rd year of establishment of the RCE. Subsequent IRP reviews will take place in the 6th and 9th year of establishment of the RCEs.

NRF will also do a stock-take of other major NRF initiatives such as the Research Fellowship Programme and the Competitive Research Programme Funding Scheme.

The findings from all these reviews will be discussed at the NRF Board meeting early next year and will set the stage for determining the NRF's strategies and plans for R&D investment in the next five years, 2011 to 2015.

Progress of CSI Singapore

I recently visited the CSI Singapore and was heartened to note that within its first year of operation, CSI Singapore has already attracted a substantial number of excellent researchers, co-investigators, affiliates and external collaborators.

The researchers have also been prolific with more than a hundred papers published in peer-reviewed journals.

CSI Singapore scientists are also working closely with clinician-scientists and researchers in the National University Health System on diseases such as stomach cancer and leukaemia.

Moving forward, I envisage that the Institute will play a pivotal role in galvanizing research efforts towards a better understanding of cancer in the Asia-Pacific region which currently accounts for half the world's cancer deaths.

Conclusion

Singapore is on the right track to building up our national capability for cutting-edge research and development and establishing our country as a vibrant centre for R&D.

The RCE programme is a long-term investment by the Government of Singapore.

It is part of Singapore's differentiating strategy to develop and nurture scientific talent, both within Singapore and from around the world.

In the long run, such top talent will reinforce a virtuous cycle of research excellence within Singapore universities thereby contributing to our economy and society.

Let me conclude by wishing all participants here for the conference a great time of learning, sharing and networking.

Thank you.
