

MOVERS

Leszek Borysiewicz, chief executive, Medical Research Council, London



2004-07: Deputy rector, Imperial College London

2001-04: Principal, Faculty of Medicine, Imperial College London

1991-2001: Head, Department of Medicine, University of Wales, Cardiff

Leszek Borysiewicz's experience as doctor, researcher and an academic administrator has prepared him well to lead Britain's Medical Research Council (MRC). His research knowhow is bolstered by "extremely good management judgement", says David Delpy, chief executive of the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council.

After studying medicine at what is now the University of Wales, Borysiewicz went on to the Royal Postgraduate Medical School of London, where he witnessed mixed results of kidney transplants. "The kidneys were surviving, but the patients were falling foul of cytomegalovirus," Borysiewicz says. The MRC, which had links with the school, funded him on a basic-science degree that aroused his fascination about how latent viruses could morph into pathogens.

Smitten with research, he continued as a postdoc and lecturer at the school, then went as a physician to the Gambia, which sparked an interest in global health issues. After a stint at Cambridge, he returned to his hometown of Cardiff as professor of medicine at the University of Wales. There, he assembled a large team of doctors, scientists and nurses who carried out clinical trials for a therapeutic vaccine for human papillomavirus — the first in Europe. He received a knighthood for this work in 2001.

Borysiewicz was never discouraged by negative results, says Stephen Man, who worked with him at Cardiff. "He'd use them as a new avenue for investigation," Man says. "He was extremely enthusiastic."

Moving to Imperial College, London, Borysiewicz climbed the administration ladder to become deputy rector. He developed a collegial relationship with Delpy, who was vice-provost for research at University College London at the time. They regularly reviewed strategies and considered how to respond to calls from the government, says Delpy. He and Borysiewicz look forward to teaming up again as chief executives, taking on major cross-council themes such as ageing, environmental change and health care.

In October, the UK government announced a boost in health-research funding. At the MRC, this will help expand translational research, which has been a contentious issue at an institution revered for its contributions to basic science. Borysiewicz says translation can now move forward without penalizing basic science.

Working on global health, interdisciplinary research and translating basic science to benefit society: it's a heady mix. "I can't think of a more exciting job," says Borysiewicz. ■

Jill U. Adams

SCIENTISTS & SOCIETIES

Bound for Bangalore

Norio Kikuchi received his BSc in physics from the University of Tokyo in 2000, picked up his DPhil in theoretical physics from Oxford in 2003, and then moved on to Germany for postdoctoral research. Then he did something surprising.

Although he had several offers from the United States and Europe as well as his native Japan, he joined the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) in Bangalore as a postdoc. Since last August he has worked with a group studying soft-condensed matter. He makes just US\$625 a month, much less than he would receive elsewhere. (The cost of living is lower, though, and the IISc provides housing.)

An increasing number of young scientists are attracted to India, despite lean pay cheques. Kikuchi was drawn by the chance to work with renowned condensed-matter physicist Sriram Ramaswamy. "I like Indian culture and food, and my artist wife loves India too," says Kikuchi. "That is also an important factor."

"We still encourage Indian students to go abroad for postdoctoral training," says Jayaraman Srinivasan, head of the IISc Centre for Atmospheric and Oceanic Sciences, "and many come back. At the same time, we want researchers from other countries to come and see what our institutes can offer." Nine postdocs have joined the

IISc under a new Centenary Post-doctoral Fellowships scheme, which has received applications from other countries. Kikuchi is the first foreigner chosen. "Once the scheme gets visibility, more foreign researchers will come," says Srinivasan, whose centre already has four postdocs from France through a separate bilateral scheme. The IISc can provide 50 postdocs, says associate director Narayanaswamy Balakrishnan — more if funds become available. In two years, it will open a hostel for 100 postdocs.

Other institutions are taking the IISc's cue. This month, the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), which runs more than 30 institutes, will start offering fellowships for biomedical scientists in developing countries, inviting them to work in Indian institutes and laboratories. Kanikaram Satyanarayana, deputy chief of the ICMR, says it plans to offer five fellowships a year, each lasting for one to six months with return airfare paid. One aim is better 'south to south' cooperation.

"Here I have enough time to think in a creative atmosphere, which perhaps results from Indian peoples' ways of living," says Kikuchi. "I also can focus on my work, without any unnecessary politics and paper work." ■

K. S. Jayaraman

POSTDOC JOURNAL

Starting anew

I am on American soil for the first time in my life. I was offered a postdoc research position two weeks ago, quit my time-filler job, left my home in South Africa, braved a 30-hour flight and am about to embark on a venture that will take me out of my comfort zone. Starting in February, I will conduct research for the University of Michigan, studying the communication and cognition of monkeys known as geladas in the Ethiopian highlands.

I completed my PhD just five days before writing this. For the first time in my life, I do not have the protection of a degree to buffer me. While I was studying, time was flexible and success hinged on a thesis that only my examiners would ever read. Now I have a contract, and an army of peers will determine whether or not I do well. I feel utterly exposed. Will I be capable of generating truly novel hypotheses? How independent am I, really? Being a 'fellow' — not a student — sounds frightening. It also sounds exhilarating. Am I equipped to handle it?

I am tackling these questions by jumping in at the deep end. For the next two years I will be overstimulating myself in an isolated, strange place, immersing myself in a research subject that I've only toyed with in the past. I think I can make it. I will have hundreds of shaggy primates to help keep me sane. If they fail, great evacuation insurance will fly me out to the nearest mental institution. ■

Aliza le Roux is a postdoctoral fellow in animal behaviour at the University of Michigan.