

Dear Sir

I enclose the following observations about the proposal for a single UK health research fund

I have serious concerns about this proposal and wish to make the following comments and observations.

1. The purpose of mergers is to save money and it is notable that the broad figures being quoted are already less than the budgets at present.
2. All mergers occupy a great deal of time and hence lost productivity. This exercise is already doing that before it is implemented. The benefits are not self evident.
3. Basic research in the MRC is currently underfunded but historically has been of major benefit in health outcomes in unpredictable ways.
4. The research funded by the NHS does not appear to be controlled to the same degree as the extensive MRC peer review. Ring fencing for basic research is essential for long term research and medical development.
5. Whilst getting translation from basic to the clinic is important there has been good progress recently and this depends on funding avenues and ability to make the correct contacts. This will not be helped by the proposal and will be hindered as discussed in point 2.
6. Translation is largely dependent on pharmaceutical companies and spin outs. This does not address one major area that a new initiative in NHS research and development could address and that is those diseases that may be expensive to treat (overall in terms of hospitalisation, drugs, loss of earnings etc) but a single drug is not of sufficient value to attract major pharmaceutical interest. However a fund to develop these would fill a niche and would be cost effective in terms of national healthcare.
7. In conclusion, a single Health Research Fund does not appear to offer clear benefits but this initiative could be used as an opportunity to restructure NHS research by making funding more transparent and in particular to develop new approaches to improving NHS treatments.

Yours sincerely

Neil Barclay

Professor of Molecular Immunology
Sir William Dunn School of Pathology
University of Oxford