

Summary of Discussion Science Advisory Board

**Teleconference
April 6, 2004**

Attendance

Members

Judith Hall
Keith Bailey
Karen Grant
John Kelton
Chris Loomis
Paul Paquin
Janet Rossant

Ex Officio Members

Karen Dodds (for Diane Gorman)
Patrick Borbey
Lisa Camelon for Scott Broughton
Ray Edwards for Susan Fletcher
Kevin Keough
Charles Mallory for Marcel Nouvet
Janice Hopkins for Wendy Sexsmith
Edith Morber for Ian Shugart.

Secretariat

André La Prairie
Susan Tessier

Regrets

Ardene Robinson Vollman
Lorne Babiuk
Robert Brunham
Patricia Clements
Linda Lusby
Kathryn O'Hara
Mark Goldberg
David Roy
Stanley Vollant
Ian Green
Janice Charette
Alan Bernstein
Pierre-Gerlier Forest
Dixie Snider

Opening Remarks

Dr. Judith Hall, Chair

Dr. Hall thanked members for taking time to participate in the teleconference, noting the importance of providing timely advice concerning the role of Health Canada's Chief Scientist. She noted that the role has changed since the Board first proposed a Chief Scientist. The anticipated changes at Health Canada and the recent "360°" review of the Office of the Chief Scientist both suggest to the Board that it would be important to discuss these items and provide the Chief Scientist with some timely advice.

Opening Remarks

Dr. Kevin Keough, Chief Scientist

Budget 2004 confirmed plans to create a new Public Health Agency for Canada, the new position of a Chief Public Health Officer for Canada, and plans to work with provinces and territories towards a Pan-Canadian Public Health Network. Dr. Keough noted that the Agency would serve as the focal point in the federal system for public health matters. Its mandate will be determined after a new Chief Public Health Officer has been established, but is expected to:

- Lead and manage federal efforts aimed at preventing and managing public health emergencies;
- Lead and manage federal efforts aimed at infectious disease monitoring and control;
- Lead and manage federal efforts related to chronic disease and injury monitoring and control;
- Develop, implement and assess policies, programs, services and strategies that encourage population health, health promotion and wellness.

Over the short term, the Agency will likely assume responsibility for the services, resources and staff now located within Health Canada's Population and Public Health Branch. No decisions have been made on the new organizational structure and reporting relationships, nor on what other areas of the department, if any, might logically join the new Agency. It is generally held that the Agency will work with several regional "nodes", which may become the network infrastructure for the public health activities.

The Chief Public Health Officer for Canada (CPHO) is expected to manage and lead the Agency and will report directly to the Minister of Health. A process for selecting the Chief Public Health Officer for Canada is expected to begin shortly.

A process to find a new Chief Scientist for Health Canada is also underway.

Discussion Summary:

- There was some discussion about the different reporting relationships and accountability methods with a “portfolio” agency that reports directly to the Minister.
- A call letter from the Deputy Minister has already gone out seeking potential candidates for the Chief Scientist. Board members were strongly encouraged to forward names.
- There was some discussion about the observation in the “360°” report questioning if the role of the Chief Scientist is to be a leader of the science community or a scientist who informs policy and decision-making. The Board believed the Chief Scientist must be a strong leader of Health Canada’s science community in order to have the credibility to inform policy and decision-making.
- It was observed that the incumbent Chief Scientist has done an excellent job of leading and raising the profile of science at Health Canada, and that the new Chief Scientist should continue to do so and take on even more of active role as an advisor. It was noted that the “360°” report is a review and not an evaluation of the Chief Scientist and his office. It was also noted that the position of Chief Scientist is only 3 years into its mandate, and this may not be an appropriate time to radically alter the mandate. The Board supports a prioritizing exercise as the best approach at this time.