

Reaping riches

Denice Rice

THE head of Western Australia's peak adult medical research group has warned that the state's potentially world-leading research industry will falter unless academics embrace commercialisation.

Western Australian Institute for Medical Research director Peter Klinken said that, unless academics, especially those at the grass roots level, started seeing their work in a commercial context, WA would lose a unique opportunity to

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be a world-recognised centre for medical research and innovation.

"Here in the most isolated city in the world we have two Nobel Prize winners as well as some other remarkable achievements, but there is only a narrow window of opportunity to build on these," he said.

"Researchers and academics can no longer look at their work in isolation; they have to start looking for ways to sustain their efforts financially."

Professor Klinken said that, not only had Perth produced some world-first medical breakthroughs, it had also gained a reputation for excellence in clinical trials.

"Australia has the advantage of being much more agile and being able to get things done quickly, especially in the area of clinical trials," he said.

"Australia was named in *The Economist* as one of the best places in the world to get clinical trials done, which is something we should be capitalising on.

"We need to wake up and make the most of this on a big scale.

"There is a window over the next five to 10 years where research in this town needs to be really competitive, otherwise we'll be in trouble.

"Staff retention, productivity, results and growth don't discriminate and allow for the difference between commercial or not-for-profit organisations, so not for profits must be just as competitive as the commercial companies if we are to achieve our aims."

Professor Klinken pointed to the entrepreneurial culture in US, where they looked to find commercial opportunities between industry and academia, creating a sophisticated environment in which researchers were valued.

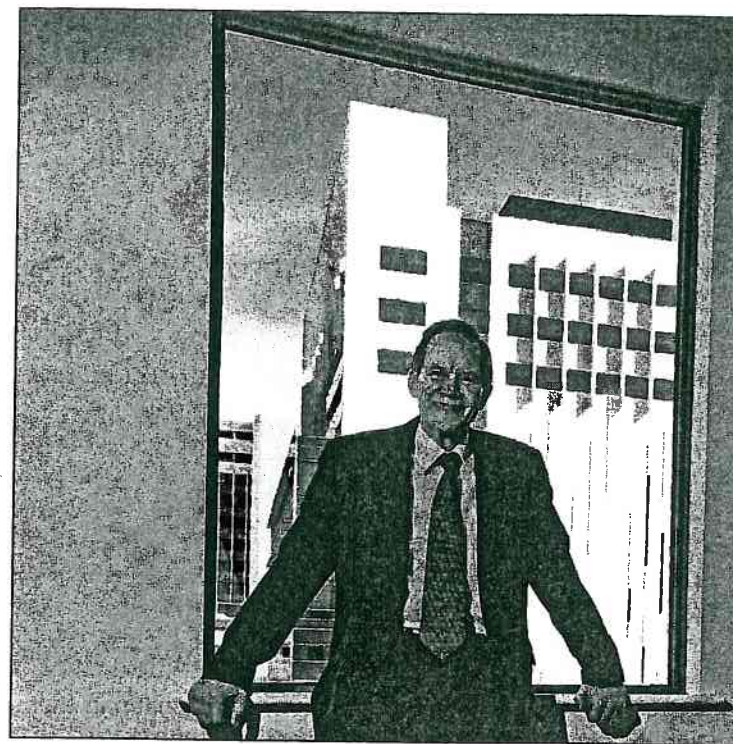
"You can't expect to attract the best medical researchers in the world to work in an environment where what they do is not valued," he said.

"If we haven't got the best medical research happening here, we'll struggle to get the best doctors here, because the best doctors want that cutting-edge research happening around them, they want access to that type of expertise.

"If we don't attract those types of health professionals who are going to be looking at finding cures, then all we're going to have is a collection of very good technical people.

"WAIMR has embraced a number of

of research



CULTURAL SHIFT: Peter Klinken has warned of lost opportunities if academics fail to embrace commercialisation.

Photo: Grant Currall

opportunities, including Ozgene, to create commercial entities within our larger structure that will benefit the WA community and fund our ground-breaking research projects."

Other commercial ventures fostered by WAIMR include an early-stage clinical trials facility, another facility to produce pure antibodies for research, the

consultancy and analysis firm Proteomics International, and the privately owned Dimerix Bioscience, a start-up drug discovery company.

Biomedical research company BioPharmica is also in partnership with WAIMR and the University of Western Australia in a bid to commercialise the discovery of the tumour suppressor gene HLS5.