

The John Curtin School of Medical Research: The First Fifty Years, 1948–1998. By Frank Fenner & David Curtis (Brolga Press, Gundaroo, 2001, available from the JCSMR, Australian National University and the Co-op Bookshop), 565 pp.

THIS IS A REMARKABLE HISTORY OF A FINE AUSTRALIAN RESEARCH AND research training institution, the John Curtin School of Medical Research (JCSMR) at the Australian National University (ANU), Canberra. The JCSMR was one of the foundation research schools of the ANU's Institute of Advanced Studies—the vision of Howard Florey, John Eccles, Marc Oliphant, Keith Hancock, H. C. Coombs, John Crawford, Raymond Firth, and Douglas Copland—that gave us our most original and productive research university.

The history constructed by Frank Fenner and David Curtis more than does the JCSMR justice. It contains a narrative of the organisational and political history of the school, which is what such histories normally achieve. But in addition it contains eighty-nine essays by present or former staff on highlights of the School's research over the past fifty years. The ten chapters cover Biochemistry, Cell Biology, Clinical Science, Human Genetics, Immunology, Integrative Biology, International Health, Medical Chemistry, Microbiology, and Neuroscience. Accompanying them are biographies of staff and postgraduate students associated with the work, and bibliographies of seminal publications.

These essays are distinguished by their lucidity and historical sense, where the work is located in the wider context of the discipline and pressing medical concerns. It is, therefore, a major contribution to the history of Australian medicine, clinical science and basic science and will serve as a core reference for many, many years. The book represents an immense labour of love by the co-ordinating authors and a testament to the professionalism of the medical research community in Australia. Perhaps, in the future, other institutions will be persuaded to embark on a similar combination of narrative history and professional annals, although searchable electronic publication on the web may be the more practical and affordable means of publication.

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