

Melbourn UCL S

**IMPLANT TRACKING**  
**REVISITING THE INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE**

by

**Professor D.F. Williams**  
**The University of Liverpool**  
**Liverpool UK**

Minister, Professor Howlett, Ladies and Gentlemen

Never attribute to malice what can be adequately explained by incompetence.

A number of you here this evening may recall that I was asked to present the international perspective on implant tracking at the previous meeting held in Hyannis, Massachusetts, in April last year. Some of you may even remember that I chose that occasion to make some remarks about certain fellow members of the international community. Accordingly it came, first with great surprise and then with considerable disquiet, that I was invited to give a presentation this evening. For, as John Ramshaw, Derek Beech, Jerome Werkmeister and a few others will tell you, I chose the Australian contingent as the recipient of my sense of international humour, and not for the first time.

At no stage I have considered this as incompetence on behalf of the organisers here and unhesitatingly attribute this to malice. I have no doubt that I have been set up here tonight, but I do appreciate the foresight of the organisation for giving me six months rather than six hours to prepare my off-the-cuff-remarks this evening.

Mind you, I was first told that I has to give the after dinner speech. As you can see this was modified a little later, like this afternoon, to a mid-dinner speech. And I was also told, after I had accepted the invitation, that I would be followed by an Australian speaker, Mr Clifford Hughes, and then much later on, I was informed that I would be preceded by another speaker, no less than a Minister of the Australian government. The no - win malicious situation became apparent as I saw myself very much in an Australian sandwich, a speaker before me to whom I have to be very respectful and an apparently witty speaker to follow who will have the last word. A far cry from the solo Welsh finale that I thought I had been asked to give to an audience mellowed by wine but not yet asleep

However, the world is quickly bored by the recital of misfortune and so I won't dwell on this predicament, but will get on with it and just as Julia Roberts said to Richard Gere in *Pretty woman*, 'In case I forget to tell you later, I really enjoyed this evening

I have to mention the Welsh bit just in case anybody thinks that somebody from Liverpool has to be English and to make sure that any comments that follow later this evening which are derogatory about the English simple don't apply to me. Nor does anything about the Scottish. What a strange race they are, the men wear kilts with little or nothing underneath, but then they go to such extreme lengths of modesty, as that rare glimpse provided for us by Professor Lidgren showed, such that an orthopaedic surgeon in Scotland has to operate on the hip by an under armpit approach.

But to get back to where I was, I do have to say that we appreciate the honour of having Mrs Crowley here this evening. There must be many pressures on a Ministers time, with so many invitations to do this and that as well the everyday job of attending to the affairs of state. It's the same the whole world over of course, and politicians always have the problem of balancing their activities and knowing when to travel and when to stay at home in the legislative chamber. With indecision being so rife amongst politicians, a few weeks ago back home in the House of Commons a bill making attendance compulsory was passed by three votes to two, so that at least now the indecision will be final.

It was interesting this morning hearing John Fielder tell us of the activities of US legislators, in making it illegal to disclose information about the videos we hire. That thought creates a number of visions, about the favourite videos of famous people that would come to light. For example, just a few politicians and ministers. No doubt Bob Hawke kept a copy of 'The Crying Game' at home, and Bill Clinton 'Indecent Proposal'. The Prince of Wales has clearly been watching 'Fatal Attraction' and our poor Queen, who has seen all of her offspring have so much trouble with their marriages and is looking forward to some piece and quiet believes that 'Four Weddings and a Funeral' would be appropriate

But let us get on with the real issues of today

'Towards an International Tracking and Data System' is the title of this Symposium. Let us, like the pathologists some of us are or like cynics of which the rest of us are made, dissect this theme, and cut, trim, block

,section , mount, stain and analyse what we have left. Of course there are some pathologists who can only leave their stains behind, but we won't go into that.

Now that I have to speak in between courses and allow time for eating, I am not able to do this thoroughly and can only address a little of the subject matter contained in the title.

But first we have to note that we have a Symposium. This, according to tradition, is a gathering of important people who can singly do nothing but collectively can decide that nothing can be done. Let us hope for a little more positive thinking than that.

A Symposium, academically, is a forum at which participants may present to others the results of their recent endeavours, preferably with erudite, reasoned and original argument. There are those who might suggest that an Australian symposium was oxymoron, but then I wouldn't dream of making such an assertion.

I would, however, say that an International Symposium of this nature should be a highlight, an occasion in which real progress is made, for although we have Conferences galore, they usually serve one purpose only, the furtherance of the individual CV and corporate profile, whereas we have a chance and indeed a responsibility to make progress in debating an enormously important issue.

In passing I should note and comment on this obsession that we academics have for publishing trivia which even more unfortunately is rarely original trivia. One is reminded so often when reading today's scientific papers of the comment of Dr Johnson that **'there are parts of this which are new and parts which are interesting. Unfortunately those parts which are new are not interesting and those parts which are interesting are not new.'** It is also interesting that if you steal from one author it is plagiarism but if you steal from many it is research

The obsession about publishing is, of course, based on the fashion for performance assessment in academic circles where everything we do is monitored, assessed, re-evaluated, quantified and made public. Implant tracking should be easy since we have perfected academic tracking so effectively. The pursuance of tenure has become an end in itself.

Did you know that God never received tenure. And why?

Well , for a start, he had only one major publication.  
And that was in Hebrew  
And it did not contain any references to original source material  
And some even doubt he wrote it himself  
His ability to co-operate with others was very limited  
And the scientific community has had a very rough time trying to repeat his results.

The symposium is described as international. What does that mean? How do we qualify or endorse internationality, especially at a time when half of the world is dividing itself up into even smaller nations and the other half is trying to make itself into supernations.. The world of course is getting smaller all the time as it becomes possible to travel all over the place with ease. There was a time when Rolf here was unknown in Sydney, now he is unknown throughout the world. You can tell when people get sensitive about their nationality. They put maps on slides to introduce their talks. And the very sensitive ones adulterate their maps to make them look even more important than they are not. Derek, you needn't have done that. We all know that Australia, otherwise known as the Antipodean triangle is that mysterious place in the Southern Hemisphere where all people of talent disappear. It was interesting to note that both Swedish presenters showed maps of their own country.

Talking of talent I think we should recognise the tremendous professionalism of Rolf's group here in putting on this Symposium . They have spared no effort in getting everything right. I don't know if you noticed it but there was even a small Erratum slip in the Symposium Proceedings which read This Erratum slip has been placed here by Mistake.

But to return to internationalism, it is good to see so many people here today from all over the world. I think that many people decided to come here when they heard that the next meeting would be in Buffalo. Cape Cod, Melbourne,... then Buffalo. Why Buffalo? I know it quite well, I spent 20 years there one night. It is of course only just over the border from Canada and you will all have an opportunity to attend the next Biomaterials World Congress in Toronto. Mind you, the Canadians are as strange as the Scottish at times, once being likened to Vichyssoise soup, as cold, half French and difficult to stir.

Now we come to Data, and to be serious for a moment. A simple word, complex meaning, poorly understood. Most of us don't even know if data is singular or pleural. I have to tell you, however, that data is not the pleural of anecdote. Just as stringing together a series of unrelated events does not provide you with a story, so the compilation of randomly acquired information about individual implant experiences does not constitute data from which decisions should be made. That is one reason why it is difficult to separate data from systems within our framework here since all the data that is to be obtained has to belong to a unified system.

Now I am an advocate of the old-fashioned idea that conclusions and judgements can only be based on knowledge, and the causes of so many of our problems today rest with the application of spurious hypotheses and explanations of events unencumbered by a knowledge of the facts and underpinned by the prospect of financial gain. Criticism it seems is never inhibited by ignorance. In particular it never ceases to amaze me the transformation that comes over some people as they move from laboratory to courtroom where the discipline of decades of scientific endeavour gives way to the expert witness syndrome. No data but damning indictments. To paraphrase someone else, whom I cannot remember, this is a pimple on the ass of progress that has to be lanced

And when the books are eventually written and the tales told, and the unbelievable positions taken by so many self proclaimed experts come to light, then we will be able to apportion blame and decide whether it is incompetence, or malice, or indeed avarice.

And with a legislator here I should pass a comment on one of the main reasons why this state has come to pass. It is a single word, contingency. We do not have it in the UK, but the Law Society has been pressing for it and I understand it is to become acceptable practice. We need contingency like Van Gogh needed stereo.

Now I cannot finish on a serious note. I suppose I could tell you some of the racy stories recited to me by the Minister this evening but then, perhaps I should be a little more cautious.

But some of us are getting older; just ask Jack Lemons, who is so old that when Mozart was his age he was already dead. And as we get older we are reminded that my own original profession, metallurgy is the

personification of ageing, for we begin to see silver in the hair, gold in the teeth, iron in the soul and lead in the feet.

Ladies and gentlemen, I trust that no such fate befalls you for a while yet.