

## A conversation with Mark Lim, May 30, 2013

### Participants

- Mark Lim, Program Manager, Medical Research Innovation, *FasterCures*
- Alexander Berger, Senior Research Analyst, GiveWell

**Note:** This set of notes was compiled by GiveWell and gives an overview of the major points made by Mark Lim in the conversation.

### Summary

Mark Lim is a Program Manger at *FasterCures*. GiveWell spoke with him to learn about *FasterCures*' role in the field of medical research policy and funding.

### Policy areas of interest for *FasterCures*

**Young researchers.** The current funding environment has an impact on the rate of medical innovation by impeding the development of young investigators. Scientists are now spending a higher percentage of their time writing proposals, rather than on mentoring young investigators. The NIH's K grants, which provide funding to investigators in the stage just before they become independent investigators, have been increasingly difficult to obtain. As a result, young investigators may choose careers outside of their original academic goals by going into private practice, working for industry, or moving abroad to do research in more generous research institutions.

Dr. Lim is not aware of other groups working on the issue of the effect of funding cuts on young investigators. *FasterCures* is interested in bringing attention to this issue, possibly through blogging, briefings and other methods of communicating to the broader community.

Changing the way the NIH works is difficult, and funding young investigators would be high-risk with the potential for high-reward. But the risk makes it difficult to sell to funders.

**More efficient collaboration.** There are currently over 100 non-traditional collaboration groups that bring together diverse actors to identify and address bottlenecks in medical research. *FasterCures* is creating a guidebook on these consortia to facilitate efficient collaboration.

**Clinical data transparency.** In the EU and UK, there is a push to make clinical trial data public. The governments agree that the data should be shared and the debate is now largely around how to best share the data. Drug companies, while willing to share their data, are concerned that data sharing could hurt their competitiveness

by giving other companies insight into their development processes. Patient advocacy groups may also have concerns about patient privacy which is dependent on the patients and their conditions that they represent. There are also general concerns about the potential public health impact of less informed readers misinterpreting the data, as has happened with measles vaccination being linked to autism in the eyes of the public. It is still a contentious issue. But the sharing of data could reduce inefficiencies in medical research, and more importantly, could also reduce the number of participants needed for clinical trials. The first meeting on this was held in the US recently, but the debate is much more advanced in Europe. GSK recently decided to share all its data, as did Roche. GSK clinical trial data will be available through an application process in which a third-party approves applicants who can show they will use the data responsibly. The Cochrane Collaboration has helped make the case for the importance of data sharing for better science. *FasterCures* plans to watch this debate and potentially play a role in the future.

**NIH and FDA funding.** Before sequestration took effect, *FasterCures* worked with the Friends of Cancer Research to host a briefing with 300 participants on Capitol Hill. Other groups that are working on this issue include United for Medical Research (of which *FasterCures* is a part), American Association for Cancer Research, and Research!America.

**Medical innovation.** Through the Milken Institute, *FasterCures* helped to host a global conference on innovation in medicine, which was attended by 18 congressmen, the director of the CDC and other important policymakers. This is in addition to the Celebration of Science conference in 2012, which focused on reaffirming the US commitment to science and research.

**Healthcare reimbursement.** *FasterCures* is interested in learning more about the reimbursement landscape and how it might be improved. In particular, the current reimbursement structure reduces incentives to do research on and produce diagnostic tools.

*All GiveWell conversations are available at <http://www.givewell.org/conversations>*