

Decade of Discovery: India Alliance Celebrates 10 Years of Enabling Biomedical Research in India

The Wellcome Trust/ DBT India Alliance, funded by the Wellcome Trust (UK) and the Department of Biotechnology, Government of India, celebrated a decade of growth across an unmatched portfolio of globally competitive fellows and biomedical research projects, 12–14 November 2018.



14th November 2018

New Delhi

The launch of the Wellcome Trust/DBT India Alliance, 10 years ago, was a novel experiment in funding and engagement in India—one that aimed to identify the best researchers; nurture them as future leaders; and thus build excellence in biomedical research.

Tracing the ten-year journey of India Alliance, shows how it has grown into a leader of science funding in India by anchoring a generous and flexible fellowship programme that supports researchers at different career levels under the tracks of basic biomedical and clinical and public health research. The scope of the fellowships offered by India Alliance ranges from high-quality basic science to clinical research and public health interventions with far-reaching translational impacts. Researchers funded by India Alliance have been carrying out remarkable work to improve both human and animal health. Notably, the relative citation ratio of India Alliance-funded publications is considerably higher when benchmarked against national comparators; this illustrates the quality of science funded by India Alliance.

Over the years, the role of India Alliance has evolved from that of a funder to an influencer working towards establishing a research ecosystem of international standards in India. Its sphere of action, in addition to research funding, now includes capacity building for researchers through workshops, training researchers for leadership roles, informing science and health policy, facilitating international and interdisciplinary collaborations, improving research assessment policies, making science accessible, and bridging the gap between science and society through public engagement. This span of ten years can rightly be called a decade of discovery—discovery of the role that India Alliance will play in the Indian research enterprise in its next phase.

India Alliance celebrated this milestone year by hosting a three-day event, which was inaugurated by the Hon'ble President of India, Shri Ram Nath Kovind, in the presence of the Union Minister for Science and Technology and Earth Sciences, Dr Harsh Vardhan, at Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi, on 12th November 2018. The Hon'ble President of India acknowledged the pan-India reach of the fellowships supporting researchers in 93 institutions across 34 Indian cities. The Hon'ble President of India said he was happy to know that the India Alliance has designed interventions to help women researchers in science. He added that the 10th year celebration is an opportune moment for India Alliance to reflect on its achievements and draft its priorities for the future.

Dr Harsh Vardhan congratulated the partnership of the Department of Biotechnology and the Wellcome Trust for creating opportunities for clinicians of the country to participate and contribute to biomedical research.

To commemorate the tenth year, the India Alliance launched a public science talk series—The Explorer Series—that saw the participation of approximately 500 college students at the India Habitat Centre, New Delhi on 12th November 2018. This series has been specially designed to expose and inspire the young to the excitement and value of science and will move nation-wide this year to celebrate science.

On 13th and 14th November, the India Alliance hosted an array of science talks and panel discussions on cutting-edge research and research needs in India, which featured India Alliance fellows, other experts, and representatives of both national and international organizations. The panel discussion dealt on some very pertinent topics with respect to the Indian research ecosystem: breaking boundaries between clinical and basic research, developing future leaders in Indian science, creating robust ecosystems in India, and the value of international collaborations.

Additionally, in line with the efforts of the India Alliance to empower its Fellows to make their science more accessible, a science image competition/exhibition called Stories of Science was also organized. This exhibition proved that science often generates breath-taking beauty and captivating stories.

“Since our inception, India Alliance has adapted to the needs of emerging scientific challenges. Our endeavour to establish a globally recognised research ecosystem in India uses a comprehensive approach, which includes finding the best people and empowering them with support that is flexible, generous and timely. We step into our next phase with grants that will enable large-scale, interdisciplinary and collaborative team science projects and help establish clinical research centres—both focused on addressing India’s health challenges”, said Dr Shahid Jameel, CEO, India Alliance.

A decade is a significant milestone to have passed, and India Alliance looks forward to helping Indian science reach greater heights over the next decade and beyond.

Decade of Discovery
12—14 November 2018, New Delhi

12 November 2018
India Habitat Centre, New Delhi

The Explorer Series <i>Popular Science Talks by India Alliance Fellows</i>	
9.00 – 10.00	Registration
10.00 – 12.00	Why Should We Study Malaria in Birds? Dr. Farah Ishtiaq, Indian Institute of Science
	If We Can Make Computers Play Chess, Why Can't We Make Them See? Dr. S. P. Arun, Indian Institute of Science
	That Device in Your Palm Can Revolutionize Healthcare Dr. Rashmi Rodrigues, St. John's Medical College
	A Dogged Problem: Can India Eliminate Rabies by 2030? Dr. Abi T. Vanak, Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and Environment
12.00 – 13.00	Lunch

12 November 2018
Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi

Inaugural Ceremony	
16.00 – 17.00	Chief Guest Shri Ram Nath Kovind, Hon'ble President of India Guest of Honour Dr. Harsh Vardhan, Hon'ble Minister for Science and Technology, Earth Sciences, Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Govt. of India
17.00 – 17.15	Decade of Discovery: A film
17.15 – 18.15	India Alliance: Past, Present and Future Prof. Jeremy Farrar, Director, Wellcome Trust, UK Prof. M. K. Bhan, Former Secretary, Department of Biotechnology, Govt. of India Prof. K. VijayRaghavan, Principal Scientific Adviser to Govt. of India Dr. Renu Swarup, Secretary, Department of Biotechnology, Govt. of India Prof. Anuradha Lohia, Former CEO, India Alliance Moderator: Prof. Mukund Thattai, NCBS, Bengaluru, India
High Tea	

13 November 2018

India Habitat Centre, New Delhi

8.00 – 9.00	Registration
9.00 – 9.30	Welcome
	Decade of Discovery: A film
9.30 – 10.00	Keynote Lecture From Cancer Susceptibility Mechanisms Towards Early Intervention in Cancer Prof. Ashok Venkitaraman, The Ursula Zoellner Professor of Cancer Research and Director, Medical Research Council (MRC) Cancer Unit, University of Cambridge, UK
10.00 – 10.30	Technology, Innovation and Sustainable Networks to Deliver Equitable Cancer Care in India—The Childhood Leukaemia Paradigm Prof. Vaskar Saha, India Alliance Margdarshi Fellow, Director, Tata Translational Cancer Research Centre, Kolkata, India; and University of Manchester, UK
10.30 – 11.00	How a Neuron Talks to its Target: The Molecules and Mechanisms Involved in this Process Dr. Kavita Babu, India Alliance Intermediate Fellow, IISER Mohali, India
11.00 – 11.30	Break
11.30 – 12.30	Developing Future Research Leaders Prof. Noel Buckley, University of Oxford, UK Prof. Anne Ferguson-Smith, University of Cambridge, UK Prof. Sandhya Visweswariah, India Alliance Margdarshi Fellow, IISc Bengaluru, India Prof. Jyotsna Dhawan, CCMB, Hyderabad, India Prof. L. S. Shashidhara, IISER Pune, India Moderator: Prof. Roop Mallik, India Alliance Senior Fellow, TIFR Mumbai, India
12.30 – 13.00	Role of Mechanics in Stem Cells: Where Physics Meets Biology Dr. Abhijit Majumder, India Alliance Early Career Fellow, Assistant Professor, Department of Chemical Engineering, IIT Bombay, Mumbai, India
13.00 – 14.00	Lunch
14.00 – 15.00	Breaking the Boundaries between Basic and Clinical Research Prof. Gagandeep Kang, Executive Director, THSTI Faridabad, India Prof. Ajit Lalvani, Imperial College London, UK Prof. K. M. Venkat Narayan, Emory School of Public Health, USA Prof. Nikhil Tandon, AIIMS, New Delhi, India Prof. Vineeta Bal, IISER Pune, India Moderator: Dr. Anurag Agrawal, India Alliance Senior Fellow and Director, CSIR-IGIB, New Delhi, India

15.00 – 15.30	Positioning Human Nutrition at the Crossroads of Food Production and Health Prof. Anura Kurpad, India Alliance Margdarshi Fellow; Professor & Head, Physiology and Nutrition, and Head, IAEA Collaborating Centre for Nutrition, St John's Medical College, Bengaluru, India
15.30 – 16.00	Can Computations Bring Us Closer to a Functional Cure of HIV Infection? Dr. Narendra Dixit, India Alliance Senior Fellow, Professor, Department of Chemical Engineering and Center for Biosystems Science and Engineering, Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru
16.00 – 16.30	Break
16.30 – 17.00	Future of Knowledge Dr. Garima Singh, India Alliance in conversation with Dr. Subbiah Arunachalam, Co-Director, CogPrints Archive
17.00 – 17.30	The Science of Edutainment <i>Discussing Mental Health Through the Lens of Indian Cinema</i> Ms. Subhra Priyadarshini, Editor, Nature India in conversation with Dr. Mohan Agashe, Actor and Psychiatrist
17.30 – 18.00	What India's Health Research Can Do for the World? Dr. Soumya Swaminathan Deputy Director General (Programmes) WHO
18.00 – 19.30	Stories of Science <i>Science Image Exhibition</i>
19.30	Dinner

14 November 2018

India Habitat Centre, New Delhi

9.30 – 10.00	Keynote Lecture Cancer: Basic Science to Patient Care Prof Sir Leszek Borysiewicz, Chair of Board, Cancer Research UK; Former Chief Executive of MRC (UK) and Vice Chancellor, University of Cambridge (UK)
10.00 – 11.00	Creating Robust Research Ecosystems for India Prof. Balram Bhargava, Director General, Indian Council for Medical Research, Govt. of India Prof. Ashutosh Sharma, Secretary, Department of Science & Technology, Govt. of India Dr. Shekhar Mande, Director General, Council for Scientific and Industrial Research, Govt. of India Dr. Shailja Gupta, Department of Biotechnology, Govt. of India Prof. Satyajit Mayor, Director, NCBS, Bengaluru, India Moderator: Dr. Savita Ayyar, Jaquaranda Tree, Bengaluru, India
11.00 – 11.30	Break
11.30 – 12.00	Tackling the Treatment Gap for Adolescent Drinking Problems through Task-Shifting to Technology: The Case of POWERTEXT Dr. Benedict Weobong, India Alliance Intermediate Fellow, Research Fellow, Addictions Research Group, Sangath, Goa, India
12.00 – 12.30	Structure, Function and Regulation of G Protein-Coupled Receptors Dr. Arun Shukla, India Alliance Intermediate Fellow, Associate Professor and Joy Gill Chair Professor; EMBO Young Investigator; Department of Biological Sciences and Bioengineering, Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur, India
12.30 – 13.00	The Genetics of Small and Isolated Tiger Populations Prof. Uma Ramakrishnan, India Alliance Senior Fellow, Associate Professor, National Centre for Biological Sciences, TIFR, Bengaluru, India
13.00 – 14.00	Lunch
14.00 – 15.00	Value of International Collaborations Prof. Mike Turner, Wellcome Trust, UK Dr. Preetha Rajaraman, HHS Representative, US Embassy, Delhi Dr. Arabinda Mitra, PSA Office, Govt. of India Dr. Daniel Shah, Director, UKRI India Office Dr. Alka Sharma, Department of Biotechnology, Govt. of India Moderator: Dr. Simon Kay, Wellcome Trust, UK
15.00 – 16.00	Funding Science and Innovation in India Prof. Shankar Subramaniam, University of California at San Diego, USA

	<p>Dr. Shirshendu Mukherjee, Program Management Unit, BIRAC, India Dr. Rajesh Gokhale, NII, India Mr. Manoj Kumar, Social Alpha, India Dr. Harish Iyer, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, India Office Moderator: Dr. Taslimarif Saiyed, CCAMP, India</p>
16.00 – 16.30	<p>The Future of India Alliance Dr. Shahid Jameel, CEO, India Alliance</p>