



Extracts from an interview with Alan when the course was transferred to ANS in 2009

Alan Your career has spanned medical research, and the global corporate sector. My understanding is that this provided you with the opportunity to contribute something special to the Australian neuroscience community? What did you note about the value of summer neurobiology courses for students in the United States, and why did you consider this concept to be of value in Australia. How did this concept get off the ground?

"One of the biggest challenges for young, early stage career scientists is to learn the laboratory tools and techniques that will make them efficient. How do they do that? The traditional way to learn advanced research techniques is by laboriously reproducing them from the methods sections of published papers. Alternatively, some young researchers are fortunate enough to spend a few months or years in labs where these techniques are pioneered.

In the US, for more than thirty years PhD students and postdoctoral research fellows have been attending summer schools at which they learn the latest research techniques from experts in the field. I was familiar with the Woods Hole and the Cold Spring Harbour summer neurobiology courses because the company I founded – Axon Instruments – had supported them for more than twenty years by lending them voltage clamp and patch clamp apparatus and software. There are very few student places available in these residential courses, thus very few Australians had the opportunity to participate.

After Axon was acquired in 2004 I had the time to reflect on life beyond the 24/7 demands of running a business. In discussions with my wife and Professor David Copolov, and subsequently with Professor Steve Redman, it was clear that Australian neuroscience would benefit from its own summer course, a kind of “Woods Hole down-under”. Further discussions rapidly revealed broad support for the concept among leading Australian neuroscientists and very quickly the Australian Course in Advanced Neuroscience (ACAN) was born."

How would you rate the success of the course to date?

The feedback from the students, from their supervisors or principal investigators, and from the neuroscience community has been very positive. The instructors from around Australia, New Zealand, the US and UK volunteer their time and come back year after year. They wouldn't do that if they didn't find it personally rewarding and see the value for the

students. The contributions of Professor Redman and Dr. John Bekkers as Course Directors has contributed immeasurably to the success.