From Sorab Dalal: sdalal@actrec.gov.in
Subject: one page for task force members in cancer biology ?

# What is the priority areas that we should fund in India in cancer biology in the next few years ?
A. I think the notion of priority areas in any field is stupid in and of itself. One should fund the best science and that should be the only criteria. You are already in a fairly narrow area of biology, why restrict further?

# What are the changes that could be made in the functioning of the task force to make it more effective ?
A. If the task force can ensure a turnaround of less than a year between the time of application for the grant and the time the sanction letter reaches the PI that would be great. I also think that if you can ensure that finance doesn't make further cuts once you decide on a budget that would be a great help.

# What are the institutional/infrastructure/fellowships/training programs that we can create which would significantly to the effectiveness of cancer research ?

A. You should begin and fund an MD fellowship program that will help interested MD's enter science with a view that they will be most interested in translating basic knowledge into therapeutics. Once this fellowship programs takes off maybe you can provide funding to them to help them set uplabs at suitable centres (ACTREC comes to mind :)). I suggest places like
ACTREC because I envision that these clinician-scientists would spend some time in clinic and in the laboratory thus helping better translation of science into clinical practice. The clinicians at ACTREC and TMH have no time for research at this point because they are too busy in the clinic. For the positions I am suggesting, I would recommend a breakup of 4 days a week
in the lab and one in clinic. A program like this is long overdue in India. I have been pushing for something like this at ACTREC with a noticeable lack of success but if it is started by a funding agency, then it can be an all India program and will pay dividends. If the cancer program is successful,one can envisage it being extended to other disciplines.

# What should be our relationship and mechanism with international cancer funding agencies, should we have joint funding programs for example?
A. I am not against this in principle but I think this should not be a priority at this tims.

# How should the balance between PI driven and large program grants be achieved and monitored ?
A. I think that the majority of resources (90%) should be directed to PI driven projects. Large program grants should be the exception (no more than one a year) rather than the rule. I say this because I think that most people concentrate on writing these large program grants just to get a big piece of the pie and there are very few examples of the large program grants delivering what they promise (both here and in the US). I would rather see different variations in funding for PI driven projects where the amount of the grant is proportional to the requirements of and excellence of the grant.