

Renal Scientists as Innovators.

As scientists we have a duty to disseminate our findings as widely as possible to the community. However, these days, that is deemed not to be enough. We, quite rightly, have a moral obligation to society and our funding bodies to try to take our research forward into benefit for humanity as a whole. This is being done to a greater or smaller extent by some of our number and there is plenty of good advice within our own ranks on this issue. There are things that we can easily remember and do to ensure that we have the option to make the most of our research at a later date should the opportunity arise. It's a good idea to think about protection of intellectual property (IP) at an early stage. None of us enter science thinking that we are going to make a discovery that will make us rich, but a little bit of extra cash coming in to fund our research (that we don't have to write 10 grant applications to get) would be very nice and make our lives a lot more comfortable. If you think that there may be some potential in your findings then talk to the IP department of your institution before you publish. If you have presented or put any of your data into print it is deemed 'prior art' and will become difficult, if not impossible, to protect by patent. If no patent is in place then anyone will be able to copy your idea without paying you a penny. Most institutions will have someone who can help you with finding out if your idea has any 'legs'. This will be someone like a business development manager or commercial officer. They will be able to help you with patent searches to see if someone already has your idea protected and also if there is any commercial interest in it. There are lots of things that you do in the lab which are marketable; it doesn't have to be a new cure for X disease. It could be that you've made a new antibody that researchers are desperate for; companies are always on the look out for these. Maybe you've developed an assay for something; this could be very applicable to the more clinical labs. You could either market this or provide it as a service. Those of you with a more technical bent may have even made a piece of equipment. You can protect the design of this quite easily. What about novel uses for drugs which are already on the market. This may also be able to be protected, or maybe sold back to the company. Whatever it is there may well be someone out there with a need for it. Commercialisation is no longer a dirty word in science and is becoming a credible measure of research outputs. After all we became scientists to make a difference to the world and we can only do this by making what we have available to the society.

Dr Julie Williams

Useful weblinks

- www.intellectual-property.gov.uk/
- www.bbsrc.ac.uk/biobusiness_guide/Welcome.html
- www.patent.gov.uk
- www.espacenet.com
- www.delphion.com
- www.uspto.gov
- <http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/fof/>