Citation for the award of Honorary Doctor of Medical Science
Dr Hugh David Niall

Hugh Niall matriculated in 1954, obtaining first place in the State of Victoria, with special exhibitions in Latin, Greek and calculus and applied mathematics. Although he was attracted to pursuing classics and mathematics at university level, family tradition and the example of his late father, a physician, led him into medicine.

In a move that later proved of enormous value, Niall interrupted his medical course to work at St Vincent's Institute in Melbourne with the acclaimed Swedish scientist Pehr Edman, who was then revolutionising the decoding of protein structures, and applied the methods of his Swedish mentor to discover new subclasses of antibody. Edman, reclusive by nature, rarely travelled and, at a time when the shadow of McCarthyism still lingered, had been refused an entry visa to the United States. So when, with Edman's strong encouragement, Hugh Niall went to work in the US in 1967, he found himself in an enviable position for a junior researcher, being literally the only scientist in the country with expertise in a protein sequencing method that was far better than anything else available at the time.

Working at the National Institutes of Health, and later at the Harvard Medical School, Hugh Niall set out to improve on the Edman technique. He made it more sensitive and applicable to a wider range of proteins and collaborated with an instrument company on the development of a commercial version of the Edman instrument to make the technique available to the international scientific community. Meantime, in the face of hot competition from rival groups, he was first to report accurate structures for growth hormone, prolactin, parathyroid hormone and calcitonin, the latter two leading to treatments for osteoporosis and Paget's Disease. These achievements led to international recognition and numerous invitations to present his work. More tangible rewards came from granting agencies and industrial consultancies centred on his hormone studies.

Returning to Australia in 1974 Hugh Niall took up a position at the Howard Florey Institute where his team cloned and synthesised the reproductive hormone, relaxin. In 1985 he moved to California to work at the biotechnology company Genentech, where he became Vice-President of Research Discovery. There he was a director and mentor of younger scientists helping to develop new drugs. It was a productive time for Genentech's research; drugs developed under Niall's supervision that are now used to treat patients include Nutropin for dwarfism, Herceptin for breast cancer, Avastin for cancer and Lucentis for preventing blindness.

In 1995 Hugh Niall returned again to Melbourne to apply his decade of experience in a world-leading biotech company to an Australian setting, initially as CEO of Biota Holdings where he fostered an alliance between Biota, the Victorian College of Pharmacy, CSIRO and GlaxoWellcome, which led to development of the anti-influenza drug, Relenza. After a variety of other leadership roles in medical research and industry he now combines several

directorships with an appointment as a Vice Chancellor’s Professorial Fellow at Monash University.

Three years ago Hugh Niall returned to an old love: the classics. He is now well into an undergraduate degree, and has won prizes for unseen translation in both Latin and Ancient Greek in national undergraduate competition, in some measure fulfilling the promise of his accomplishments nearly sixty years earlier.