

Citation for Alek Safarian
Doctor of Medicine and Health (*honoris causa*)

Wednesday, 28 April 2021 – 1.00pm

Pro-Chancellor, it gives me great pleasure to present Alek Safarian to you for admission to the degree of Doctor of Medicine and Health (*honoris causa*) in recognition of his exceptional contribution to pharmaceutical development and regulation across the globe, and for his outstanding commitment to enabling new educational opportunities for students.

Alek Safarian is a leading innovator in the pharmaceutical and therapeutics sectors and is the founder of Australia's largest private medical research firm, Novotech. Novotech works across the Asia-Pacific region and has been involved in over 1000 clinical trials of novel therapeutic products.

Alek's contribution has helped to make therapeutic interventions and products affordable and accessible and has had a major impact on improving the lives of millions of people by reducing and preventing the burden of disease and ill health. Most notably has been its work in the Oncology and Immuno-Oncology space, which accounts for nearly half of the research projects. Alongside this, the company has also completed over 150 projects in infectious diseases and vaccine clinical studies for hepatitis B and C, HIV, and influenza.

In 2020, Novotech was awarded the Asia-Pacific Biotech CRO Company of the Year by Frost & Sullivan for its colossal success in Phase 1 through IV clinical trials. This significant achievement is in addition to over 25 other awards received during its 26-year history.

Alek is currently the CEO of ALSA Holdings, a European-based biotechnology investment firm that focuses on novel drugs and modalities in a wide variety of disease areas. It invests across the spectrum of drug development, including companies Oxford BioTherapeutics, which focuses on harnessing immune cells to cure cancer and Promatix, which uses multi-omic information to develop cancer treatments.

Of Armenian descent, Alek spent the early part of his life in London before emigrating with his family to Australia in the 1980s. He attended the University of Sydney and graduated with a Bachelor of Pharmacy in 1987. Alek's talents and interest in drug discovery and development saw his career progress quickly and in 1990, he assumed the position of Head of Scientific Affairs at Marion Merrell Dow. Alek returned to the University of Sydney and graduated with a Master of Business Administration (MBA) in 1995. These qualifications fuelled Alek's passion for science and business and were instrumental in his unfolding career as a sector leader.

Alek enrolled in his MBA through a fully employer-funded scheme and he wanted to provide opportunities for young people to enjoy the same opportunities. Alek has appreciated the tremendous opportunities that a good education can bring and wanted to share these successes with future students. This desire motivated Alek to provide a gift to the University to support an ongoing MBA scholarship. Using wealth built over the course of a most admirable career, Alek's generosity has made a positive impact on the well-being and thinking of the wider community, transforming the lives of students at the University of Sydney and removing financial barriers to their study.

The 2021 recipient has a background in geriatric medicine and is currently working as a doctor at Westmead Hospital. Originally from Broken Hill, he says his biggest challenge has been to overcome his own self-doubt in pursuit of his academic and career goals. In 2019, he was awarded the Westmead Hospital junior doctor of the year.

These MBA scholarships funded through Alek's generosity have enabled many young professionals to combine their clinician skills with business knowledge in the areas of leadership, innovation, and enterprise. This legacy will help to make changes in the healthcare sector to increase access to a wider population at lower cost and in propelling more females into senior leadership roles.

Alek applies his razor-sharp intellect and strategic abilities in both his professional and personal life and is reputed to be a formidable and highly accomplished chess player and is a passionate supporter of the Arsenal football team. Alek lives and works by the simple philosophy to treat people right, have a clear set of goals, be prepared to listen, and take the time to celebrate victories and learn from defeats.

Alek continues to develop and inspire staff and students through his close connection with the Sydney Pharmacy School. Alek is a well-respected mentor and colleague and has made a major and lasting contribution to building capability and sustainability in the healthcare sector

Pro-Chancellor, I present Alek Safarian for admission to the degree of Doctor of Medicine and Health (*honoris causa*) and invite you to confer the degree upon him.