

# National Cancer Research Institute NEWSLETTER

JANUARY 2008



## A Happy New Year to all our Colleagues!

Welcome to the first NCRI Newsletter of 2008. The last year has been a busy one for us, as you will know if you are a regular reader of this Newsletter. Among other things, we published our report on PET research, hosted an international meeting on cancer informatics, and established an alliance with the UK Respiratory Research Collaborative on lung cancer. As you will read in this issue, we have also welcomed our twenty-first partner to NCRI, the charity CHILDREN with LEUKAEMIA. We now have more colleagues than ever – with 794 receiving copies of this newsletter directly, and we hope many more seeing it, as you share it with others. Please e-mail the web link to your team or leave a hard copy in the tearoom.

Looking forward, we will celebrate our seventh birthday in April and will also be publishing our new strategic plan covering

the next five years. Thanks to all of you who have sent comments and suggestions on this over the last 9 months or so. We are continuing to develop our international links (see the pieces on Canada and the California Breast Cancer Program in this issue) and will be hosting a meeting of the International Cancer Research Partners in May. Come the autumn, it will again be time for the NCRI Cancer Conference in Birmingham which this year will be held on 5-8 October. We have been delighted that this new Conference has generated so much interest in its first three years, though we recognise the importance of continuing to develop the meeting in a way that is responsive to the needs of you in the community. If you have thoughts on how we can make the Conference better, please contact any of us personally or e-mail [info@ncri.org.uk](mailto:info@ncri.org.uk)

## New NCRI Partner

NCRI is pleased to welcome a new member to the partnership – CHILDREN with LEUKAEMIA. This charity was started by the O’Gorman family in January 1988 after the loss of two of their children to cancer. Previously the charity has invested the majority of its funds in building research centres and there are eleven Paul O’Gorman buildings and laboratories around the UK. Since 2002 they have invested an increasing share of their revenue in direct funding of research.

Unique to the NCRI partnership, CHILDREN with LEUKAEMIA has a focus on childhood cancers, in particular the causes and prevention of leukaemia. They fund research in the UK, USA and Europe, providing a mixture of programme

and project grants. In addition to their buildings and research programmes, they fund education and welfare initiatives to provide help and support to families dealing with leukaemia.

CHILDREN with LEUKAEMIA are already working in partnership with Cancer Research UK, Medical Research Council, Leukaemia Research Fund and the Department of Health in funding the Children’s Cancer and Leukaemia Group (CCLG) based in Leicester and it sponsored the CCLG session at the 2007 NCRI Cancer Conference. We are looking forward to working with CHILDREN with LEUKAEMIA in coming months and years. You can find out more about them at [www.leukaemia.org](http://www.leukaemia.org).

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*Fighting Britain’s biggest childhood cancer*

**CHILDREN with LEUKAEMIA**

Registered Charity No. 298405. Inaugurated in 1988 by Diana, Princess of Wales in memory of Jean and Paul O’Gorman



[www.ncri.org.uk](http://www.ncri.org.uk)

## Canadian Cancer Research Alliance



In December 2007, Jane Cope (Administrative Director of NCRI) attended the annual forum meeting of the Canadian Cancer Research Alliance in Toronto. CCRA is an alliance of cancer research funding organisations and affiliated partners working together to strategically enhance cancer research investment in Canada, in much the same way as NCRI does in the UK. This was therefore a useful opportunity to exchange information and compare experience.

CCRA has a three-pronged mandate: (1) It responds to research needs by planning, initiating and overseeing appropriate peer-reviewed research initiatives (2) It works to coordinate cancer research, target gaps

and eliminate unnecessary overlap at a pan-Canadian level, and (3) It identifies, develops and initiates large transformative cancer research initiatives. In September 2007, CCRA published its analysis of Cancer Research Investment in Canada (downloadable at [http://www.ccra-acrc.ca/aboutus\\_publications\\_en.htm](http://www.ccra-acrc.ca/aboutus_publications_en.htm)), which showed a total spend of about 250m Canadian dollars in 2005. The pattern of spend across the major categories showed some similarities with the UK with strengths in basic science and clinical trials and less investment in prevention and diagnosis. CCRA has recently joined the International Cancer Research Partnership of which NCRI is a member together with the major cancer research funders in the USA. We hope to extend to include more European countries in the near future.

## Joint scientific meeting of the NCRI Prostate Cancer Collaboratives

In 2000, the Department of Health (England), Cancer Research UK and Medical Research Council funded two Prostate Cancer Collaboratives, in order to bring together groups from around the country to concentrate their efforts on prostate cancer. In November 2007 the Collaboratives held their joint scientific meeting, where researchers from around the country came to present their latest findings.

Professor Ros Eeles (Institute of Cancer Research, London) opened the conference by presenting her exciting findings from genome wide association studies in prostate cancer. Through their study of samples collected from the ProtecT study, Professor Eeles's group has identified seven new alleles associated with increased risk of prostate cancer. The results were so new that the identity of the alleles could not be revealed, pending publication. Further presentations demonstrated the growing strength of the UK in translational studies of prostate cancer. Gert Attard illustrated the heterogeneous nature of some



*Professors Freddie Hamdy, Norman Maitland, David Neal and Craig Robson outside Buckingham House, New Hall, Cambridge.*

prostate cancers. Through multi-coloured FISH (Fluorescence In Situ Hybridisation) analysis, different areas of tumours in the prostate were shown to have different genetic defects. He also illustrated how one particular chromosome rearrangement

was associated with extremely poor prognosis. This finding may have implications for the classification and treatment of prostate cancer in years to come.

The Principal Investigators of the collaboratives, Professor Colin Cooper (Institute of Cancer Research, London) and Professor David Neal (University of Cambridge) spoke of their evolving plans to forge a stronger relationship between the two groups.

Going forward they are planning joint procedures for storing and accessing biospecimens collected by the groups. They also proposed establishing a single mechanism for the assessment and validation of biomarkers, to help speed their progress the clinic.

## New NCRI Chair in April 2008

When Professor Mike Richards completes his two-year term as NCRI Chair at the end of March this year he will be succeeded by Sir Kenneth Calman. While previous Chairs have represented a single NCRI partner, Sir Kenneth has worked for, or with, a number, both in the Government and Charity sectors. We are delighted to welcome Ken to NCRI and will publish a more detailed profile in the next Newsletter.

## Knighthood for past NCRI Chair



At NCRI, we were delighted that Professor Alex Markham received a knighthood in the New Year Honours List. Alex was Chief Executive of

Professor Alex Markham Executive of Cancer Research UK when he succeeded Sir George Radda (then Chief Executive of the Medical Research Council) as Chair of NCRI in October 2003. During his two and a half years as Chair, Alex was committed to the need for cancer research funders to work in partnership and, although he has stepped down both as Chair and from his position at Cancer Research UK, he continues to take a close interest in NCRI, and in particular remains chair of the NCRI Informatics Management Board.

## Call for proposals in Lung Cancer Screening

Research into the early detection and diagnosis of lung cancer was highlighted as a priority in the NCRI report "Lung Cancer Research in the UK" (<http://www.ncri.org.uk/includes/Publications/reports/LCReport.pdf>). NCRI has been working with the funders to examine in detail the case for the UK joining the international research effort to determine if screening with spiral CT can save lives. As a result the NIHR Health Technology Assessment Programme has taken the lead in developing a commissioning brief for research in this area. In December they released a call for proposals for feasibility studies as the first stage in the commissioning process. The closing date for submissions is 12 March 2008. Please see the HTA website for further details <http://www.hta.ac.uk/funding/standardcalls/topics.shtml>

## Cancer Reform Strategy for England

The Cancer Reform Strategy for England was launched in December 2007, and was widely welcomed in the cancer community. In September 2000 the Cancer Plan for England had set out a comprehensive programme of action linking prevention, diagnosis, treatment, care and research. The new Strategy extends this, with a further investment of funds, to enable the transformation of cancer care from prevention and diagnosis, through to treatment and aftercare, with the aim of building a world-class cancer service for NHS patients in England. Key elements of the strategy include prevention, faster treatment, extended screening, fast-track drug approval and extended services for the increasing numbers of people surviving cancer.



*Prof. Mike Richards speaking at the Britain Against Cancer meeting*

Many NCRI partners, from Government, Charity and Industry, were involved in the consultation that fed into the strategy, not only in relation to research, but also prevention and care. The preparation of the NCRI's own five-year plan has proceeded in parallel and we have been able to ensure that there are many common themes so that the future topics for partnering in research will address the most pressing needs for better understanding, firstly of how to prevent cancer, and secondly so that we can offer patients an earlier diagnosis, and the best treatment and care. NCRI's actions are, of course, UK-wide and will continue to reflect health strategies in all four countries of the UK.

The Cancer Reform Strategy can be found at [http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH\\_081006](http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_081006)

## Early Clinical Trials Forum

The second Early Clinical Trials Forum (ECTF) will take place on 24 January in London at the Royal Institute of British Architects. The theme for the morning plenary session is 'Novel Methodologies in Early Clinical Trials' and will feature speakers from both academia and industry discussing their experiences of incorporating combination therapies, imaging and other novel methodologies into early phase clinical trials. In the afternoon delegates will be invited to attend one of

three workshop sessions. The workshops will focus on (1) Immunotherapeutics, (2) Translational Radiotherapy and Innovations in Radiotherapy and (3) Cancer Research UK Phase 1/2 clinical trials.

The second Late Phase Trials Forum (LPTF) is scheduled for 26 June 2008 at the Royal College of Physicians in London. To register an interest in the LPTF please email us at [forum@ncri.org.uk](mailto:forum@ncri.org.uk).

## Confederation of Cancer Biobanks



On 15-16 January the Confederation of Cancer Biobanks (CCB) held a two day workshop, at the Wellcome Trust in London, on quality assurance and quality control in biobanking. The meeting attracted over 150 delegates and clearly met a demand for consideration of some of the practical and technical aspects of biobanking.

The meeting started by examining the legal and ethical frameworks for human tissue banks in the UK, together with an international perspective and also addressed the requirements for quality management systems. The program moved on to consider design features essential to the generation of a functional and secure IT platform in which to store biosample information and associated medical data. The second day highlighted some of the issues to be considered in the collection, storage and further processing of specimens in order to ensure samples collected by biobanks

are suitable for research. Presentations focused on the factors that affect the quality of DNA, RNA and protein isolated from human biosamples and the preparation and use of tissue microarrays.

The workshop featured a number of lively discussion sessions which allowed delegates and speakers to discuss their current experience and future needs, and actions will be agreed to help the banks work together in these areas in future.

The CCB is pleased to welcome four new biobanks to the Confederation, making 9 in total. The new members are the UK DNA Banking Network based in Manchester, CamUro-Onc based in Cambridge, the Candis Cancer Tissue Bank Research Centre based at the University of Liverpool, and the Northern Ireland Tumour Bank. We know that other applications are in preparation and look forward to extending the Confederation further.

To find out more about the CCB and its activities and the benefits of membership please visit us at [www.ncri.org.uk/ccb](http://www.ncri.org.uk/ccb). An application to join can be made at any time.



*Delegates at the Confederation of Cancer Biobanks (CCB) two day workshop*

## Consumer experiences in research – an international dimension

Hilary Blackburn, one of the consumer members of the NCRI Board, and Karen Inns, Consumer Liaison Lead at NCRN, attended the California Breast Cancer Research Program Symposium, held in September 2007 in Los Angeles.

The Symposium brought together people affected by breast cancer and research experts – approximately 35% of participants were patients or advocates – and provided an excellent opportunity to learn about recent advances and to share ideas about consumer involvement. Much of the most recent research in breast cancer, including such topics as screening and personalised medicine, was discussed at the Symposium. Particular emphasis was placed on disparities in access to care, treatments provided by healthcare professionals, and possible environmental causes of cancer – these are two areas of research that will benefit from a new, strategic research initiative for which \$18 million has been specifically allocated by the Program.

The California Breast Cancer Research Program has, since 1994, awarded over \$181 million for research projects and often funds innovative research that other agencies may be reluctant to support. Collaborative research with the community is particularly encouraged and a significant level of funding has been awarded to partnerships between community members and experienced scientists. The partnership works together to identify the research question, develop the research plan, carry out the research and disseminate findings to the community. Further information is available at [www.cbcrp.org](http://www.cbcrp.org).

Representatives of the California Breast Cancer Research Program will be among those attending an international meeting of cancer research funding organisations, organised by NCRI for May 2008, and this will provide a further opportunity to share learning and experiences of consumer involvement in research.

## National Cancer Intelligence Network (NCIN)

The NCIN provides an example of how NCRI plans to work more closely with the NHS, whilst at the same time providing new opportunities for research. NCIN will provide a new national information resource to promote the development of cancer services and provide a platform for high quality epidemiology and health services research relating to cancer. It will bring together a variety of health datasets including those held by cancer registries, and the Health Episode Statistics (HES) and Radiotherapy Episode Statistics (RES) databases to provide cancer intelligence on a national scale. This will drive the development of cancer services and provide a powerful, new resource for epidemiological and health services research.

For the NHS, NCIN will provide authoritative population-based data on clinical outcomes and patient experiences, which will be made available to both professionals and patients. This information will be used by commissioners to develop and improve services. For NCRI partners, there will be opportunities for research provided by the newly linked datasets. During 2008, an access policy will be developed and there will be scoping of priority research questions. The NCIN Coordinating Team will be led by Chris Carrigan (formerly National Coordinator Cancer Registration in England). Work has already commenced in England and will extend to other UK countries as and when they wish to join in. Close links are being made with the NCRI Informatics Initiative and the Confederation of Cancer Biobanks.

## New Funding streams available through MRC and NIHR

Following the Cooksey Report on Health Research Funding published in December 2006, an Office of Strategic Coordination of Health Research (OSCHR) has been set up to develop a joint strategy for publicly-funded health research, involving the Medical Research Council (MRC) and Department of Health (DH). DH will now distribute its research funds through a new National Institute for Health Research (NIHR).

In October 2007, the Government announced an additional £300m pa for initiatives to be taken forward through these new arrangements. New calls for proposals will come on stream at regular intervals during 2008 and cancer researchers are

encouraged to check the MRC and NIHR web sites at regular intervals for calls that may be of interest. In general, they will not be disease-specific but many will be relevant to cancer. At the time of writing calls are currently out for a methodology research programme, a patient research cohort initiative, and a programme in cell therapy research and health technologies. New arrangements are also in place for the for funding of clinical trials. Investigators should look at the following web sites before preparing new applications.

For further information go to [www.mrc.ac.uk](http://www.mrc.ac.uk) or [www.nihr.ac.uk](http://www.nihr.ac.uk).



### Search the Web with NCRI Finder

The NCRI Finder search engine enables cross site searching of organisations involved in the cancer research field. From research paper abstracts to announcements of new clinical trials, you will be able to find all the information you need.

If you have any comments or news stories for inclusion in future editions of the NCRI newsletter, please contact: [info@ncri.org.uk](mailto:info@ncri.org.uk)