

National Cancer Research Institute NEWSLETTER

JANUARY 2007



Welcome to the First NCRI Newsletter of 2007

The first NCRI Newsletter last Autumn was well-received. The format of brief updates and web references to further information seems to meet your wish to keep in touch without being overwhelmed with information. The Newsletter will continue to be distributed by e-mail and is also available on the [NCRI website](#), where

you can register to receive an e-mail copy if you are not yet on our distribution list. Hard copies are available for meetings, including those of the NCRI Clinical Studies Groups, and for Conferences. If you would like to receive copies for your meeting, please contact us at info@ncri.org.uk

New Appointees to the NCRI Board

John Neate, Chief Executive of the Prostate Cancer Charity has succeeded Joanne Rule, Chief Executive of Cancerbackup. This position on the Board is occupied by someone from outside the NCRI partnership to provide a perspective from the wider stakeholder community.

We are also pleased to welcome two new Partner members to the Board:

Ian Diamond, Chief Executive of the Economic and Social Research Council and **Jeremy Hughes**, Chief Executive of Breakthrough Breast Cancer. These appointments follow the retirement from

the Board last year of Peter Cardy, then Chief Executive of Macmillan Cancer Support. During discussion in 2006, the Board decided to increase representation from among the smaller Partners from 3 to 4. Ian and Jeremy join Teresa Tate of Marie Curie Cancer Care and Mark Matfield of the Association for International Cancer Research, in this capacity.

We are also currently seeking to increase the consumer representation on the Board and will make an announcement on this shortly.



John Neate



Ian Diamond



Jeremy Hughes

International meetings

In November, Secretariat staff attended the All-Ireland Cancer Conference in Belfast, and took the opportunity to discuss collaborations with colleagues in both the North and South of Ireland. The Conference acted as a showcase for the work of the Ireland-Northern Ireland-National Cancer Institute (Washington DC)

Cancer Consortium which aims to tackle all aspects of cancer on the island of Ireland, and proceedings included a renewal of the Memorandum of Understanding between the countries. Further information about the Consortium can be found at <http://www.allirelandnci.org/>

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International meetings (continued)

The General Assembly of the EUROCAN+PLUS project took place on 11-12 December, hosted by the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) in Lyon. Delegates from across Europe met to discuss progress in this EU-funded project which is aimed at improving mechanisms for the coordination of cancer research across Europe (see www.eurocanplus.org). The UK was represented by Diana Dunstan of MRC and Jane Cope of NCRI. The analysis is beginning to identify some areas for focus at international level, including the possibility of a knowledge repository, the provision of leadership, seed funding to get new international initiatives going,

facilitating collaboration with industry, coordinating infrastructure functions such as biobanking, and promoting translational research. The challenge in the second and final year of the project will be to develop solutions which add value to the activities of member countries and avoid duplication. UK delegates will continue to play their part in this work.

During the first week of 2007, the French Institut National du Cancer (INCa) and NCRI jointly hosted a meeting on cancer genetics in Paris. Delegates from France and the UK were joined by visitors from the USA, Canada, Japan and New Zealand for a review of the field and discussion of

collaborative opportunities. Of particular interest was a session on lung cancer genetics, since lung cancer has been highlighted as a priority by both France and the UK. More broadly, it was clear from the presentations that many large data sets are being generated from whole genome association studies, and that there is a need for a coordinated approach to their analysis and decisions of further work. A report and recommendations from the meeting are in preparation.

NCRI Cancer Conference

Almost 2000 delegates attended the second annual NCRI Cancer Conference in Birmingham last October, an indication that this is rapidly becoming the premier cancer research conference in Britain. The central ethos of the conference is to provide the right opportunity and atmosphere to encourage cross-disciplinary communication between cancer researchers and between researchers and patients. The feedback suggests that the broad and accessible plenary programme encouraged researchers to sample sessions outside their main areas of interest and the social programme provided a great opportunity to strengthen existing relationships and forge new ones.

The new additions to the programme proved to be very successful. The public lecture by Fran Balkwill was so popular that a change of venue was necessary to accommodate the audience. The careers workshops were also well attended and will remain a feature of future programmes. To get more of a flavour for the event you can access the 2006 Conference video on the website at <http://www.ncri.org.uk/ncriconference/video/>.

Plans for the 2007 Conference are well under way. This year will see a development in the structure of the programme. There will now be three different types of sessions. Plenary sessions will again take place in the main lecture hall and no other sessions will run at these times. There will be a total of six sessions with broad themes, which will run concurrently on the Monday and Tuesday mornings. We will again be running more specialised parallel sessions and in response to feedback, there will be fewer of these sessions than in 2006.

The 2007 Conference will take place in the Birmingham International Convention Centre from 30 September to 3 October. Abstract submission opens on 1 March.

If you are interested in any sponsorship opportunities at the conference please contact Dr Fiona Hemsley (fiona.hemsley@cancer.org.uk) or Sharon Vanloo (sharon.vanloo@cancer.org.uk).

Please visit the website frequently to keep up to date with the programme as it develops: <http://www.ncri.org.uk/ncriconference/>.

A number of the plenary speakers have already been confirmed:

- Barbara Weber - Vice President, Translational Medicine and Genetics, Oncology, GlaxoSmithKline
- Nancy Davidson - Director of the Breast Cancer Research Program, Sidney Kimmel Comprehensive Cancer Center
- Frank McCormick - Director of the UCSF Comprehensive Cancer Center
- Greg Verdine - Harvard University, Erving Professor of Chemistry
- James Allison - Sloan Kettering Institute, Chairman Immunology Program
- Sheila Bingham - Dunn Human Nutrition Unit, Deputy Director
- Amanda Ramirez - Guy's, King's & St Thomas', Head of Psychosocial Oncology Programme
- David Tuveson - CR-UK Cambridge Institute
- Anton Berns - Netherlands Cancer Institute, Director of Research



Consumers play a part in developing plans for PET scanning research

An NCRI Strategic Planning Group has been considering the opportunities and needs for research into the use of Positron Emission Tomography (PET) scanning in cancer and other diseases. The report from the group, "A Framework for PET Research in the UK", will be published early in 2007.

The consumer viewpoint on the group was represented by Myrna Gray and David Ardron, both of whose families were impacted by lung cancer - a disease where PET scanning can now help



Myrna Gray



David Ardron

determine the most appropriate treatment. Both commented particularly on the expert chairmanship of Professor Robert Souhami and the genuine interest of the group in discussing issues from a patient perspective. The report will emphasise the importance of well-chosen patient related end-points that are appropriate for diagnostic, rather than treatment-based research, and the role of consumers in the development of research protocols.

Dave and Myrna both commented that they "enjoyed the experience and felt supported by briefings from the Secretariat". They welcomed the opportunity to feed comments in after the meetings, following time for further discussion and reflection. Participating in meetings with people with a professional responsibility for research management can be challenging and both

felt it would have been helpful to have time at the beginning of the process to get to know people on a more personal level - a suggestion that will be taken on board for future groups of this kind. Both Myrna and Dave thought "the experience of working on the group had been very useful and has increased our ability to present a consumer perspective at a more local level".

Dave and Myrna also helped to lead a discussion about PET at a meeting of the full Consumer Liaison Group (CLG) which enabled a broader consumer input to the project. A number of CLG members also provided valuable comments on the draft report. NCRI is very grateful to Dave and Myrna and other members of the CLG for their contribution to the work of the Strategic Planning Group and the preparation of the report.

Capacity Building for Supportive and Palliative Care

Following the setting up of two Collaboratives in Supportive and Palliative Care (SuPaC), NCRI Partners recognised that these would not immediately address all the needs for additional research or for the provision of incentives for clinicians and other practitioners to get involved in research in this area. It was decided to offer a number of capacity-building grants, each worth about £80k, targeted specifically at supporting isolated or new investigators. The aim is to provide some assistance in achieving their research potential and to address some of the gaps in the evidence base. To overcome the dangers of isolation the recipients of these grants will work closely with the SuPaC

Collaboratives. Capacity-building grants have been awarded to the following for a range of topics, particularly relating to physical symptoms and their control:

- Dr Sara Booth (Addenbrooke's Hospital, Cambridge)
- Professor Kenneth Fearon (University of Edinburgh & Royal Infirmary)
- Dr Deborah Fenlon (University of Southampton)
- Dr Leanne Fleming (Southern General Hospital, Glasgow)
- Dr Miriam Johnson (University of Hull & St Catherine's Hospice)
- Dr Barry Laird (University of Edinburgh & Western General Hospital)

- Dr Gozde Ozakinci (University of St Andrews, Bute Medical School)
- Dr Emma Ream (King's College London)
- Ms Vanessa Siddall (Nottingham City Hospital)
- Dr Patrick Stone (St George's University of London)
- Dr Bee Wee (Oxford Radcliffe Hospitals)

Further information about the initiative in Supportive and Palliative Care can be found at http://www.mariecurie.org.uk/forhealthcareprofessionals/palliative_care_research/NCRISupportiveandPalliativeCareResearchCollaboratives

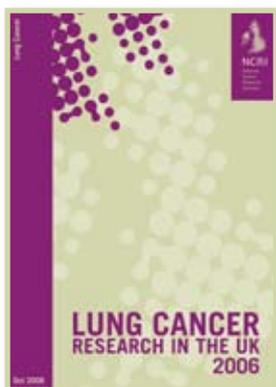
NCRI Early Clinical Trials Forum

The NCRI hosted its first Early Clinical Trials Forum in London on 7 December 2006 to great acclaim. The meeting focussed on biomarkers in early clinical trials and was attended by nearly 200 people from a broad range of backgrounds including senior academics, PhD students, lecturers, consumer representatives, clinical oncologists, and QA managers.

Delegates attended an open plenary session in the morning with thought-provoking presentations on apoptosis, anti-angiogenesis, heat shock proteins and tumour vaccines. The afternoon session was split into breakout sessions covering Quality Assurance, Immunotherapies, Imaging in Early Phase Trials and a closed session for the Cancer Research UK Phase I/II Committee. Feedback

from the meeting has been extremely positive with 100% of responders saying they would be keen to attend future meetings, which will take place on an annual basis. There will also be a Forum for Translational Research in Late Phase Trials which will meet for the first time on 5 July 2007. Watch out for further details on the NCRI website soon or register an interest by e-mailing forum@ncri.org.uk

Lung Cancer



The report from the NCRI Lung Cancer Strategic Planning Group (SPG) was launched at the NCRI Cancer Conference, with a press release and a press

conference led by Peter Cardy (Chair of the SPG) and Mike Richards (current NCRI Chair). The report concludes that there is no easy or quick fix to tackling the current lack of lung cancer research in the UK. Nine areas of activity are outlined where the NCRI could help to further progress lung cancer research, in the short and longer term.

Additional funds totalling £2.25m have already been raised to undertake

research on supportive care for lung cancer patients. More details of this initiative will be announced shortly.

The SPG identified the poor profile of lung cancer as a major barrier to progress in research. To help overcome this, a Working Party on Communication about Lung Cancer was established, comprising representatives from a number of NCRI partners who specialise in communication and public relations. The first meeting of the group took place in December and actions are being planned to actively promote positive stories about lung cancer. We are also considering how to assess public perceptions objectively, so that any changes can be monitored.

Access to lung cancer biospecimens was highlighted as another barrier to progress. We are in discussions with onCore UK and the Lung Cancer Clinical Studies Group to determine how to boost lung cancer sample collection in the UK.

Screening for lung cancer was highlighted as an area of strategic importance. Currently there is the opportunity for the UK to contribute to a European lung cancer screening trial. Before pursuing this option, SPG members asked for more information on the feasibility of implementation. Professors Dave Whynes, John Field and Stephen Duffy are currently working on a health economic model to help identify and define the interrelationship between the key factors that will determine the feasibility of a national screening programme. This is expected in the Spring.

Further progress with the recommendations will be reported on the [NCRI website](#) and in the newsletter.

Experimental Cancer Medicine Centres (ECMCs)

Dr Mags Sara recently joined Cancer Research UK to head the ECMC Secretariat under the direction of Professor Herbie Newell. Mags will be known to many of you, having previously worked in both NCRI and the UK Clinical Research Collaboration (UKCRC). The ECMC Secretariat hosted its first meeting of the new ECMC network on 6 December 2006. The meeting successfully brought together, for the first time, senior representatives from all ECMCs across the UK, the Departments

of Health, Cancer Research UK and NCRI to begin to discuss both the objectives and future plans for the network and address any issues facing the Centres. Presentations from the specialist groups set up as part of the previous NTRAC initiative (e.g. Quality Assurance and Research Nurse groups), as well as from the NCRI Consumer Liaison Group and Cancer HelpUK focused on identifying their needs and future role in the ECMC network.

The ECMC Secretariat will build on these discussions, to maintain the enthusiasm to support the network in its activities, facilitating communication and collaboration.

Further information on the ECMCs is available on the [NCRI website](#), alternatively Mags can be contacted via email on mags.sara@cancer.org.uk

Research Methodologies

The need for new research methods has been highlighted in a number of NCRI's analyses including those on Supportive & Palliative Care and Prevention & Risk. Early in 2006, NCRI convened a small group to consider what specific action, if any, needed to be taken by NCRI in this area. It was concluded that there was already work ongoing, including workshops planned by other organisations, and agreed that NCRI should not duplicate these.

A web page providing links to relevant information and resources was thought to be potentially useful. This has since been developed and was launched in November 2006. The site includes links to various web pages that provide information and online resources considered to be of use to the community. The website has received considerable interest and can be found on the [NCRI website](#).

If you know of any other useful sites that we could include please email us at: info@ncri.org.uk

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