

National Cancer Research Institute NEWSLETTER

MAY 2007



Reflections from Mike Richards on a year as Chair of the NCRI



Mike Richards

It is now a year since I succeeded Alex Markham as Chair of the NCRI and it has been an action-packed 12 months. We have published two reports – on Lung Cancer and Positron Emission Tomography (PET) – which have been in gestation for some time, and actions are now being taken forward to boost research in these areas. The second NCRI Cancer Conference in Birmingham in October 2006 was another great success as we reported in the last Newsletter. From my perspective as National Cancer Director for England, the Government's announcement last autumn of the intention to develop a Cancer Reform Strategy to build on what we have achieved with the National Cancer Plan presents an important opportunity - both to highlight how much NCRI has strengthened cancer research over the last few years, and to further cement the importance of this research into Government policy. A particular focus for this is planned to be a National Cancer Intelligence Network which will bring together information from cancer registries and other sources within the NHS into a comprehensive national data set which can be used to generate clinical outcome data that will inform service needs and policy development as well as being a rich resource for research. More information

will be available later in the year when the Cancer Reform Strategy is published.

In March this year, Alex Markham stepped down as Chief Executive of Cancer Research UK (CR-UK) and has been succeeded by the former Chief Operating Officer, Harpal Kumar. In his time at CR-UK, Alex has been hugely influential in shaping NCRI, both as Chair for two and a half years and through personally championing the NCRI Cancer Conference. I am therefore delighted that he will be continuing as Chair of the NCRI Informatics Initiative and has also agreed to stay on the NCRI Board in a personal capacity for the immediate future. We also look forward to working with Harpal in his new capacity, confident that he too is a strong supporter of our aims.

Elsewhere in this Newsletter you will read that following an independently conducted consultation, NCRI Partners have agreed that the organisation has been highly productive in its early years and that the current organisation and working methods remain largely fit for purpose. This gives us the green light to develop our next strategic plan which will come on stream in April 2008. We will be consulting widely over this in the coming months and I look forward to hearing your views. If you would like to be directly involved, do keep an eye on the website or contact a member of the Secretariat.

New Consumer members for the NCRI Board

Hilary Blackburn and Joanna Eley have recently joined the NCRI Board and will attend their first meeting in June.

Hilary was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2002 at the age of 32. She has been involved as a charity volunteer for a number of years, working with Breast Cancer Care, Macmillan Cancer Relief and Marie Curie Cancer Care. Currently on maternity leave

following the birth of her second child, Hilary is a strong advocate for partnership between patients and health professionals: "Having worked voluntarily for a User Partnership group within the NHS since my treatment, 5 years ago, I see huge benefits to a true partnership between health professionals and patients and carers. It is a learning experience for all of us. Much progress has been made but there is still a

(continued on p2)

Inside this issue:

- Reflections from Mike Richards on a year as Chair of the NCRI
- New Consumer members for the NCRI Board
- NCRI Partner Survey
- Herbie Newell takes over as Board Sub-Group Chair
- NCRI Late Phase Trials Forum (LPTF)
- NCRI Secretariat News
- A Framework for PET Research in the UK
- Delivering Cancer Informatics
- Working with Industry
- Consulting on the next NCRI Strategic Plan
- 2007 NCRI Cancer Conference Important Dates

New Consumer members for the NCRI Board *(continued from p1)*

lot of work to be done and I very much look forward to joining the board of the NCRI at such a pivotal time in its development.”

Joanna’s background is as a carer for her husband who has been living with Acute Myeloid Leukaemia for nearly ten years. During this time, she has gained considerable insight from the consumer perspective into the workings of the health

service, social services, and the conduct of clinical trials, and wants to put this to good use for the benefit of other patients.

As she told us: “I have come to appreciate how very complex the field of cancer research, trials and treatment is today. I hope to be able to work on ways for helpful information to reach patients, carers and the general public.”



Hilary Blackburn



Joanna Eley

Herbie Newell takes over as Board Sub-Group Chair



Herbie Newell

In January 2007, Herbie Newell succeeded Alison Spaul as Chair of the NCRI Board Sub-Group on Clinical and Translational Research. Herbie is Director of Translational

Research at Cancer Research UK (CR-UK) and Professor of Cancer Therapeutics at Newcastle University. The Board Sub-Group provides a forum for more detailed discussion of strategy relating to clinical and translational research than is possible in the thrice-yearly NCRI Board meetings. It

also fosters links between the networks and other infrastructural initiatives, especially biobanking and informatics. Professor Newell moves into the Chair at a time when CR-UK have taken on the Coordination role for Experimental Cancer Medicine Centres, and the organisation of twice yearly Forum meetings for translational research. ‘I am delighted to be taking on this chairmanship at an exciting time for cancer research, and for NCRI, as we start to prepare our next 5-year plan’ said Professor Newell. ‘On behalf of all the NCRI Partners I would also like to thank Alison Spaul for her skilful chairmanship over the last two years.’ Dr Spaul represents the Scottish Executive on NCRI, and continues as a member of the Board Sub-Group.

NCRI Late Phase Trials Forum (LPTF)

Following the success of the first NCRI Early Clinical Trials Forum (ECTF) in December 2006, a companion event focussing on late phase trials will be held on 5 July this year at the Royal College of Surgeons in London. The theme for the morning plenary session will be ‘Biomarkers in Late Phase Clinical Trials’ and will be followed by workshop sessions in the afternoon. As with the ECTF, the

aim is to create a forum for discussion and to foster collaboration and the sharing of results and experiences. The meeting is intended to be as inclusive as possible, involving not only senior investigators and industry scientists, but also younger scientists, research nurses, data managers, consumers and funding bodies. For further information and to register go to <http://www.ncri.org.uk/lptf>

NCRI Partner Survey

As part of our evaluation strategy we asked Opinion Leader Research to conduct an independent survey of what the Partners think about NCRI, how it is run, and its achievements.

In general Partners are highly satisfied with what has been achieved since NCRI’s inception in 2001. We have proved that collaborative working across sectors and among organisations with different missions can be highly effective. The successes that were highlighted included research initiatives such as that in supportive and palliative care, the increased accrual to trials in NCRN, the commitment to consumer involvement and the NCRI Cancer Conference.

The Partners also agreed to continue with the current organisation of NCRI, whilst wishing to improve mechanisms of communication and ensuring that appropriate links are formed with the new Office of Strategic Coordination of Health Research (OSCHR) and related structures being set up following the Cooksey report published in December 2006.

A fuller summary of findings from the survey can be found at <http://www.ncri.org.uk/default.asp?sectionID=WhatWeDo&pageID=AddingValue>.

NCRI Secretariat News

The Secretariat staff will be back up to full strength from June when Dr Karen Groot joins the team as a programme manager. Karen replaces Dr Julie Lenihan who left in December 2006 and she will have responsibilities in the areas of translational research, cancer biobanking, supportive and palliative care and related activities.

Both Forums are closely linked to the development of the network of Experimental Cancer Medicine Centres, and aim to be responsive to their needs as well as having broader appeal. The second ECTF meeting is planned to take place early in 2008.

A Framework for PET Research in the UK

NCRI recently published a report examining the current state of play of PET research in the UK – analysing the needs and opportunities, particularly in cancer research, as well as identifying problems and barriers, many of which also apply to the wider use of PET. PET scanning has the potential to provide a major advance in how treatment for cancer patients is managed, preventing the inappropriate use of radical therapy and, in the future, it may guide drug and radiotherapy treatments more precisely to improve patient outcomes. PET is also used as a tool to improve the process of developing new drugs and it is likely that this use will grow, both for cancer and other diseases.

PET is, however, a complex and expensive technology to use – there are significant infrastructure requirements and a number of challenges that must be overcome to realise the full benefits. The main recommendation from the report, therefore, is that a coordination function will be established to provide national leadership and to enable organisations to work together to facilitate PET research. The UK PET Research Steering Committee and associated coordination unit are designed to work with existing structures and processes such as the UK PET-CT Advisory Board, which has overlapping concerns with training and audit, the National Cancer Research Network and the network of Experimental Cancer Medicine Centres.

We are delighted that Professor Sir Michael Peckham, formerly Director of R&D at the Department of Health, has agreed to chair the UK PET Research Steering Committee. Sir Michael has a strong interest in PET scanning and the NCRI Board is confident that he, together with the proposed coordination function, will provide the necessary leadership to drive PET research forward. A call for expressions of interest to run the PET research coordination unit will be issued shortly.

If you would like copies of the report, please email us on info@ncri.org.uk or download the report from the NCRI web site (http://www.ncri.org.uk/includes/Publications/reports/petreport_low.pdf).

Delivering Cancer Informatics

The vision of the NCRI Informatics Initiative is to enable the diverse resources for cancer research to be accessible as a coordinated and collated asset. Such resources – data and also tools to analyse and maximise the knowledge gained from data – are often disconnected and not easily available to researchers. Bringing such resources together in a coherent informatics platform will increase the impact of individual research projects, reduce duplication and accelerate the generation of new knowledge.

Under the leadership of Robin Clark, the NCRI Informatics Unit has developed a detailed implementation plan to deliver the vision. The Unit is actively recruiting staff and work is in progress to develop the infrastructure network called ONIX – Oncology Information eXchange – which will enable resources to connect to the informatics platform and be accessible to users. The data and tools that comprise the platform are intended to evolve as projects from the cancer research community develop – a call for expressions of interest to shape a possible funding stream, subject to sufficient funds being raised, has recently been issued.

In tandem with the work on ONIX, strong efforts are being made to involve the cancer community and strategic



partnerships have been formed with the National Cancer Institute in the USA and the European Bioinformatics Institute to ensure international compatibility and make the best use of existing resources. A joint NCRI Informatics – Cancer Biomedical Informatics Grid (caBIG) workshop is being held on July 12th and 13th at the Wellcome Trust, London. This will be a unique opportunity to find out about transatlantic informatics activities from the leading researchers in the field. To find out more about informatics and to access the on-line registration for the workshop, visit www.cancerinformatics.org.uk

Working with Industry

Patient benefit from research generally arises as a result of the combined activities of both the non-profit and commercial sectors. There is a mutual dependency – commercial companies are reliant on the non-profit sector for basic research while new treatments and diagnostic tools, even if first discovered in academia, require commercial backing to complete the development process and gain market access.

The Association of British Pharmaceutical Industry (ABPI) is a Partner in NCRI and is helping us to work with industry on a number of projects and in looking for ways to increase the number of collaborative links. With leadership from the UK Clinical Research Network (UKCRN), effective mechanisms have been set up for industry to work with the late phase clinical research networks. There are now a number of commercially-sponsored clinical trials in the NCRN portfolio and collaborative studies, where the protocol is developed jointly, are also increasing.

We are also working with companies in the Informatics Initiative, in the Experimental Cancer Medicine Centres, and the Early and Late Phase Clinical Trials Forums – and many companies provide important sponsorship of the NCRI Cancer Conference. Identifying new areas of common interest and activity with companies in the pharmaceutical, biosciences and healthcare sectors will be flagged as a priority for NCRI in the next Strategic Plan.

Consulting on the next NCRI Strategic Plan



Preparation for the next NCRI strategic plan has begun. The plan will set the agenda for a five year period, starting April 2008 albeit with less detailed plans for years 4 and

5. Initial inputs to the plan have derived from a number of sources, particularly

strategy discussions with the NCRI Board and Partners. The plan must be responsive to research needs that may be identified during development of the Cancer Reform Strategy for England which is due to be published by the Government later this year.

In the coming months, we will hold an open consultation with the wider cancer research community, among both professionals and consumers. This will primarily be web-based though

the Secretariat will be pleased to meet with stakeholder groups for interactive discussion, on request. All subscribers to this newsletter will be notified by email when the consultation goes live.



cancer conference
ncri
national cancer research institute

2007 NCRI Cancer Conference

30 September - 3 October 2007
The International Convention Centre, Birmingham, UK



Important Dates

- Abstract submission extended to **8 May**
- Successful Abstract Authors notified by **1 July**
- Late Breaking abstract submission opens **9 July**
- Late Breaking abstract submission closes **3 August**
- Registration opens on **1 June**
- Early bird registration closes on **31 July**
- Registration closes on **31 August**
- Consumer Bursaries Application closes on **29 June**

NCRI Cancer Conference Secretariat

PO Box 49709, 61 Lincoln's Inn Fields, London, WC2A 3WZ, UK
t: +44 (0)20 7438 5453 e: ncriconference@ncri.org.uk

www.ncri.org.uk/ncriconference/

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