

# National Cancer Research Institute NEWSLETTER

SEPTEMBER 2007



## Building Collaborations in Cancer Informatics



Earlier this summer, leading researchers with an interest in cancer informatics from the USA and the UK came together for the first Joint NCRI Informatics-caBIG™ Conference, held at the Wellcome Trust in London. This 2-day meeting provided the opportunity to hear about progress in cancer informatics, share ideas and establish new collaborations.

After introductory sessions on the NCRI Informatics Initiative and the Cancer Biomedical Informatics Grid (caBIG™) run by the National Cancer Institute, the conference focused on five themes:

- The 21st Century Clinical Trials session highlighted the informatics tools that are being developed to better handle imaging and pathology data
- The session on Vocabularies gave a diverse perspective on encouraging the use of standard vocabularies



and included the work of the European Bioinformatics Institute and caBIG™. Participants also heard from cancerGRID (part of the UK's e-science programme) about their activities in integrating translational and clinical trials data.

- Clinical Informatics looked at UK efforts to make more effective use of health related data, with presentations from the Health Informatics Research Unit in Swansea, the Northwest Institute for Bio-health Informatics, and the NHS Secondary Uses Service.
- In the Tissue Banking session, presentations from both onCore UK and caBIG™ emphasised the need for coordinated effort in collating and standardising procedures for collection, storage and annotation of samples.
- Finally a session on E-Research Infrastructure featured the perspectives of leading computer scientists on the future of GRID infrastructures.

Multinational collaborations and strategic partnerships, such as that between NCRI and caBIG™, can be expected to play an increasingly important role in connecting cancer research efforts in the future. Already this meeting has led to one new transatlantic collaboration, in imaging research, and others will follow. Following the success of this meeting, a second joint NCRI and caBIG™ meeting is now being planned.

For more information about the NCRI Informatics initiative go to [www.cancerinformatics.org.uk](http://www.cancerinformatics.org.uk)



## Inside this issue:

- Building Collaborations in Cancer Informatics
- NCRI Cancer Conference 30 September – 3 October 2007
- Confederation of Cancer Biobanks opens to new members
- NCRI Late Phase Clinical Trials Forum
- A successful year for the NCRI Supportive and Palliative Care (SuPaC) Collaboratives
- New Appointment to the NCRI Board Sub-Group
- Sample collection begins at onCore UK
- Progress on Lung Cancer Research
- Developing the next NCRI Strategic Plan

## NCRI Cancer Conference 30 September – 3 October 2007



This month sees the third NCRI Cancer Conference at the ICC in Birmingham. Once again there is a line-up of plenary speakers of international calibre, coupled with a diverse programme of lectures, workshops and parallel sessions.

This year, the Programme Planning Committee has introduced a number of symposia that will each take a broad look at a particular topic, ranging from cancer biomarkers to complementary therapies. There will continue to be a number of more specialist parallel sessions, though fewer than in 2006, in response to feedback from last year. The number of proffered papers in the parallel sessions has been increased, to provide more opportunity for younger investigators to present their work.

The range of workshops on offer has been expanded so delegates can seek help and advice on topics such as writing grants, designing clinical trials, career

progression and much more. In addition, technical workshops will advise on cutting edge treatments and techniques. Again this year, we will be asking delegates to provide feedback so that we can continue to make improvements to the Conference.

This year's public lecture will be given by Professor Roger Griffin of Newcastle University, who will speak about how drugs that fight cancer are discovered and tested. This will be followed by a panel discussion.

Professor Alan Ashworth will step down as Chair of the Programme Planning Committee after this conference and we would like to take the opportunity to record NCRI's thanks and appreciation for his commitment to this over the last two years. We are delighted that Professor Stan Kaye will chair the committee for the 2008 conference and Professor Ron Laskey for 2009.

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

## NCRI Late Phase Trials Forum

NCRI held a forum meeting on 5th July 2007 with a focus on 'Biomarkers in late phase clinical trials'. The forum was well attended with over 150 delegates including senior investigators, industry representatives, younger scientists, research nurses, data managers, consumers and representatives of funding bodies.

Following plenary talks and discussion in the morning, the afternoon session was split into three workshops

on 'Genomics and proteomics in sample analysis', 'Bio-banking and tissue resources' and 'Biomarkers in development of EGFR/ErbB inhibitors'.

The feedback from the event praised the high standard of the talks, and confirmed the value of the discussion time in allowing the exchange of ideas and experiences. Over 60% of responding delegates said that the networking lunch enabled them to make new contacts which could lead to collaborations in the future.

## Confederation of Cancer Biobanks opens to new members



The founding members of the Confederation of Cancer Biobanks

(CCB) are now inviting other biobanks to join. Launched in autumn 2006 the CCB is a consortium of organisations based in the UK that are involved in the development, management and use of biobank resources for cancer research. The Confederation aims to promote and disseminate a collective view on best practices for biobanks and to promote transfer of knowledge and experiences between banks. While individual banks retain their full autonomy, the Confederation's vision is to work towards a seamless operation so that sample users experience what appears to be a single virtual biobank for the collection and distribution of biosamples for cancer research.

The Confederation has produced two documents, the Guiding Principles and the Memorandum of Understanding, which together outline the essence of the Confederation and the principles to which the members have agreed to adhere.

To find out more about the CCB and its activities or to download a CCB Membership Application form please visit <http://www.ncri.org.uk/default.asp?s=1&p=8&ss=4>. If you have any queries regarding the CCB or the CCB Membership Application please email [ccb@ncri.org.uk](mailto:ccb@ncri.org.uk).

The CCB is holding a Forum on Quality Assurance in Biobanking on 15th and 16th January 2008. Please check the NCRI website (<http://www.ncri.org.uk/default.asp?s=1&p=8&ss=4>) for further information on this meeting.

## A successful year for the NCRI Supportive and Palliative Care (SuPaC) Collaboratives



The NCR SuPaC collaboratives (CECo and COMPASS) were set up in

April 2006 with the aim of developing the research workforce in the area, increasing the extent of interdisciplinary group working and promoting collaboration both within and beyond cancer research. Both have been very busy during their first 12-18 months, getting the new structures set up and a number of activities off to a flying start.

Each collaborative is a consortium of groups from a number of universities and each has taken three broad research themes around which to build their research capacity. In COMPASS, these relate to developing accurate and efficient

patient assessment, developing and evaluating effective interventions and the evaluation of approaches to training health professionals to deliver SuPaC and ways of improving the working lives of the cancer workforce to, in turn, lead to improvements in patient care. For CECo, the themes are innovative approaches to complex symptoms, planning for the care of older adults, and study of how personal narratives of cancer can inform practice and policy. The themes are cross-cutting to some degree and will provide opportunities for joint working between the two collaboratives as time goes on.

Both collaboratives have held inaugural scientific meetings which are planned to take place annually. These enable scientists in the collaboratives to meet, get to know each other, and discuss their

research and ideas. Specialist workshops and master classes have been held, with a variety of purposes such as enabling researchers to develop collaborative research protocols, providing a forum for doctoral students and post-doctoral fellows to share their experiences, and for training in methodology. User involvement is being actively developed and mentorship of researchers within the collaborative is helping to ensure the development of high quality researchers and leaders for the future.

For more information about the NCR SuPaC collaboratives or to get involved, go to [www.ceco.org.uk](http://www.ceco.org.uk) and [www.compasscollaborative.com](http://www.compasscollaborative.com).

## New Appointment to the NCR Board Sub-Group



Dr Richard Palmer

Dr Richard Palmer has recently joined the NCR Board Sub-Group on Clinical and Translational Research.

Richard has over thirty years

experience in research and development at the Wellcome Foundation and through the transition to GlaxoWellcome. He later joined Alizyme plc and was their Chief Executive Officer and Director of Research and

Development until last year. He has recently become part-time Executive Chairman of Warwick Effect Polymers Limited, a private company specialising in biopolymers. He has also served as a lay representative on the Children's Cancer and Leukaemia Group and other medical research bodies.

Richard was nominated for the Board Sub-Group by the Bioindustry Association, to help NCR strengthen links with the commercial sector.

Richard commented, "I am excited at joining the Board Sub-Group at this

important time for enhancing clinical and translational cancer research in the UK. I look forward to playing my part in facilitating positive interactions and synergies between the biotech sector and the other members of the NCR".

The role of the Board Sub-Group is to provide a forum for more detailed discussion of strategy relating to clinical and translational research than is possible in the thrice-yearly NCR Board meetings. It also fosters links between the networks and other infrastructural initiatives, especially biobanking and informatics.

## Sample collection begins at onCore UK



onCore UK is now accepting blood and tissue samples from cancer

patients in selected NHS Trusts. onCore UK is a charitable company funded through a collaborative partnership of three NCR partners (Department of Health (England), Cancer Research UK and the Medical Research Council). In collaboration with parts of the NHS onCore UK aims to collect, process and protect human tissue samples to ensure their high quality for cancer research. onCore UK will also distribute samples to researchers throughout the UK. The availability of high quality patient samples is needed for

research into the causes of cancer and is becoming increasingly important in the development and testing of new treatments.

The patient samples will be collected, stored and distributed in accordance with legal and ethical requirements. Researchers will have access to donors' medical histories, though they will not have access to donors' identities. Brian Clark, chief executive of onCore UK, said that "Many patients want to do something to support research into their disease and to help others in the future. onCore UK can help people with cancer do this by providing them with an accessible and ethically approved way of donating samples and data. And they can do this

safe in the knowledge that their donation will be stored securely and made available quickly to researchers throughout the country who can demonstrate how the samples can help their research."

Professor Herbie Newell, director of translational research at Cancer Research UK said of onCore UK "Archives like this are crucial in the fight against cancer. Enabling scientists to access the high quality samples they need will speed the pace of research into cancer research in the UK".

For further information on onCore UK and its activities please visit [www.oncoreuk.org](http://www.oncoreuk.org)

## Progress on Lung Cancer Research

In the twelve months since the release of the NCRI report "Lung Cancer Research in the UK" (<http://www.ncri.org.uk/includes/Publications/reports/LCReport.pdf>), significant progress has been made in the priority areas identified. Improved early detection and diagnosis are vital in the campaign to reduce lung cancer mortality rates. A successful screening programme for people at high risk of developing lung cancer would be a powerful tool in trying to achieve this aim. There are currently several trials world-wide examining the effectiveness of spiral CT screening in reducing mortality from lung cancer. After commissioning a report on the potential cost-effectiveness of a screening programme, NCRI partners decided that there was a case for the UK to contribute to this research effort. The Health Technology Assessment (HTA) Programme of the Department of Health's National Institute

of Health Research has agreed to lead on this and further announcements will come forward from them.

The NCRI is forming an alliance with the UK Respiratory Research Collaborative, (Chair: Professor Stephen Holgate) which aims to promote world class respiratory research. In lung cancer we are currently examining research opportunities in early detection and diagnosis, concentrating on the interface between primary and secondary care. As recommended in our report, the Lung Cancer Clinical Studies Group and the Primary Care Clinical Studies Development Group are also joining forces to consider how they can work together on the early detection of lung cancer. Opportunities exist for collaboration between the different professionals who may see and treat lung cancer patients, including respiratory physicians, GPs, nurses,

physiotherapists, oncologists, radiologists and pharmacists. Priorities will be discussed at meetings during September.

The report also highlighted the need for improvements in the supportive and palliative care of lung cancer patients. As this illness can have a rapid trajectory, current cancer care models are not always effective and control of symptoms can be a problem for many patients. NCRI Partners have come together to provide £2.25m to fund research in this area. A call for proposals will be released very soon.

In view of the importance of communication in overcoming some of the barriers to lung cancer research, NCRI will be one of the sponsors of a major lung cancer conference in Liverpool in 2008 (<http://www.happen.co.uk/ilccl2008/index.asp>)

## Developing the next NCRI Strategic Plan



We would like to thank all those who responded to the recent consultation on the next NCRI Strategic Plan. We received well over seventy responses - from NCRI Partners,

other organisations and from individuals - and many of the responses were in turn compiled from consultations with wider constituencies, providing a broad base of opinion. Consumers - patients, carers and others affected by cancer - were particularly active in responding, both as individuals and also via a well-attended workshop, organised by the NCRI Secretariat.

Overall, there is a consensus in support of the major themes proposed for future work, in the areas of 'detection, diagnosis and prognosis' and 'improving outcomes and survivorship'. The National Cancer Research Network (NCRN) will continue to develop the portfolio of phase III clinical trials, as part of the wider UK Clinical Research Network, while the Experimental Cancer Medicine Centres (ECMC) will mature as the focus for translational research. The National Cancer Intelligence Network (NCIN) will be an important new mechanism for taking forward research requiring population-based data. Over the coming years, this will link up data from the cancer registries in the UK and merge this with a variety of other NHS data sets to provide a powerful resource for research, policy and planning.

Many of the responses contained ideas for how to take forward activities in these areas, as well as suggestions for specific sub-topics. These not only provide valuable input to the Strategic Plan itself, but will continue to act as source material for the more detailed planning of individual projects thereafter.

A draft of the Plan will be available for comment on the NCRI website towards the end of the year, and the document will be finalised early in 2008. It is due to cover a 5-year period starting in April 2008.

This newsletter is also available via email. Visit our website

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

to sign up online or contact us at [info@ncri.org.uk](mailto: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](mailto:info@ncri.org.uk)