

## National Cancer Research Institute

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Wednesday 20 October, 2004

## £12 MILLION BOOST FOR PREVENTION RESEARCH

A NEW £12 million initiative launched today (Wednesday) aims to tackle some of the major health problems in the UK, such as cancer, diabetes and heart disease, by investing in research into disease prevention. The new National Prevention Research Initiative (NPRI) will be multidisciplinary and involve some of the country's leading charities, research organisations and government to address the escalating problem.

These conditions affect the health of millions and are major killers in the UK and worldwide. The Initiative will provide funds for studies that have direct relevance on influencing health behaviours aimed at preventing or minimising smoking, alcohol misuse, and encouraging good diet and exercise.

The NPRI, brought together by the National Cancer Research Institute (NCRI), is funded by a broad consortium drawn from public funding and charity sectors: British Heart Foundation; Cancer Research UK; Department of Health; Diabetes UK; Economic and Social Research Council; Food Standards Agency; Medical Research Council; Research and Development Office for the Northern Ireland Health and Social Services; Chief Scientist Office, Scottish Executive Health Department; Welsh Assembly Government and World Cancer Research Fund (WCRF UK).

The NPRI welcomes approaches from other organisations wishing to join the consortium, to help grow this important initiative.

Dr Diana Dunstan, who chaired the working party that developed the NPRI, says: "This unique initiative will be looking to fund research which crosses traditional boundaries between disease groups. In the UK we have a number of funding bodies that provide grants to work in their specific area, be that cancer, heart disease or diabetes. This approach has led to many important developments but combining our efforts to focus on common prevention issues will ensure we maximise benefit to the UK public".

## £12 MILLION BOOST FOR PREVENTION RESEARCH.....2

Health Minister, Lord Warner, says: "Preventing disease through trying to change people's behaviour is key to reducing deaths from major killers such as cancer and heart disease which affect the lives of millions. Initiatives like this bring together the expertise and knowledge of charities, researchers and government to help ensure less people suffer from these devastating conditions. That is why the government is contributing funding to this partnership approach to change health-related behaviour".

Roger Wilson, cancer patient and Chair of the NCRI Consumer Liaison Group, says: "Research into treatment is making a huge difference to patients but it is also vital that we work on effective ways to prevent disease. It has been exciting to see this important initiative gain commitment from such an impressive list of research organisations. If we can identify better and more effective ways of helping people modify their behaviour we can expect to see fewer people in the future being affected by chronic disease".

The NPRI is being launched in response to an NCRI report, published today, which shows that research into preventing obesity and encouraging physical activity and reducing smoking rates in the UK is in need of greater investment. In 2002, the NCRI revealed in its Strategic Analysis report that only 2% of the combined spend of NCRI partners was on cancer prevention research.

Smoking, obesity, and lack of exercise are risk factors for cancer and also for coronary heart disease and diabetes. Poor diet is also a known risk factor for all three diseases.

Professor Alex Markham, Chair of the NCRI, says: "The new report has identified gaps in prevention research and helped to focus our attention on areas of scientific opportunity. I am pleased that the new initiative has the backing of other health organisations, along with the NCRI partners, to push forward prevention research in the areas of smoking, alcohol misuse, obesity and exercise. The NPRI will bring together experts across a wide range of science to develop new multidisciplinary approaches to tackling complex research questions".

The NCRI is a partnership of the 19 largest organisations from the government, charity and industry that undertake cancer research in the UK.

The Medical Research Council on behalf of the funding partners will manage the new Initiative. An Open Meeting is planned for 12 November 2004 to provide further information about the initiative to researchers.

## ENDS

For media enquiries, please contact the NCRI press office on 0207 061 8311/8300 or, out-of-hours, the duty press officer on 07050 264 059.

## £12 MILLION BOOST FOR PREVENTION RESEARCH.....3

### Notes to Editors

**The National Cancer Research Institute** (NCRI) was set up in April 2001. It is a partnership between government, the voluntary sector and the private sector, with the purpose of streamlining and accelerating the advancement of cancer research in the UK. A wider aim is to draw up a new, more focused, cancer research agenda, encouraging work in neglected areas but also acting as a general resource and authoritative voice for cancer research. The NCRI aims to do this by developing strategy in key areas of cancer research in the UK and co-ordinating activities between member organisations.

The NCRI Board identified prevention and risk research as a priority area in 2002 and set up a special working party to review research in this area. The working party publishes their report today.

The NCRI consists of the main funding bodies for cancer research in the UK:

- the main Government cancer research funders: the Medical Research Council; the Department of Health; Chief Scientist Office, Scottish Executive Health Department; Welsh Assembly Government, Research and Development Office for the Northern Ireland

Health and Personal Social Services, and the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council.

- the main charities that undertake cancer research: Cancer Research UK, The Wellcome Trust, Ludwig Institute for Cancer Research, Marie Curie Cancer Care, Tenovus, Breakthrough Breast Cancer, Association for International Cancer Research, Yorkshire Cancer Research, Macmillan Cancer Relief, Leukaemia Research Fund, Breast Cancer Campaign and Roy Castle Lung Cancer Foundation.
- the pharmaceutical industry involved in cancer research represented through the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry (ABPI).

The **British Heart Foundation (BHF)** is leading the battle against heart and circulatory disease - the UK's biggest killer. The Charity is a major funder and authority in cardiovascular research. It plays an important role in funding education, both of the public and of health professionals, and in providing life-saving cardiac equipment and support for rehabilitation and patient care. For more information on the BHF, visit [bhf.org.uk](http://bhf.org.uk).

**Cancer Research UK** is the world's leading charity dedicated to research on the causes, treatment and prevention of cancer. We are one of the few independent organisations with the ability to take pioneering research all the way from the laboratory bench to the patient's bedside. We fund over 3000 scientists, doctors and nurses based throughout the UK. Professor Alex Markham, quoted above is the Chief Executive of Cancer Research UK. For more information please go to [www.cancerresearchuk.org](http://www.cancerresearchuk.org)

The **Department of Health** invests over £550 million a year in research to support government objectives for public health, health services and social care. Over £80 million of this investment is spent on cancer research.

**Diabetes UK** is the charity for people with diabetes. We fund medical research, provide information and support to people with diabetes and campaign on their behalf. Established in 1934, Diabetes UK's mission is 'to improve the lives of people with diabetes and to work towards a future without the condition'. The largest patient body in Europe, Diabetes UK has over 180,000 members and a network of offices across the UK. For more information about Diabetes UK go to [www.diabetes.org.uk](http://www.diabetes.org.uk) or phone us on 020 7424 1000.

## £12 MILLION BOOST FOR PREVENTION RESEARCH.....4

The **ESRC** is the UK's largest funding agency for research and postgraduate training relating to social and economic issues. It provides independent, high-quality, relevant research to business, the public sector and Government. The ESRC invests more than £93 million every year in social science and at any time is supporting some 2,000 researchers in academic institutions and research policy institutes. It also funds postgraduate training within the social sciences to nurture the researchers of tomorrow. More at <http://www.esrc.ac.uk>

The **Food Standards Agency** is an independent food safety watchdog set up by an Act of Parliament in 2000 to protect the public's health and consumer interests in relation to food. The Agency's key aims are to:

- reduce foodborne illness by 20% by improving food safety right through the food chain
- help people to eat more healthily
- promote honest and informative labelling to help consumers
- promote best practice within the food industry
- improve the enforcement of food law
- earn people's trust by what we do and how we do it

The **Medical Research Council (MRC)** is a national organisation funded by the UK tax-payer. Its business is medical research aimed at improving human health; everyone stands to benefit from the outputs. The research it supports and the scientists it trains meet the needs of the health services, the pharmaceutical and other health-related industries and the academic world. MRC has funded work which has led to some of the most significant discoveries and achievements in medicine in the UK. About half of the MRC's expenditure of £430 million is invested in its 40 Institutes, Units and Centres. The remaining half goes in the form of grant support and training awards to individuals and teams in universities and medical schools. Dr Diana Dunstan, quoted above is the Director of Research Management Group at the Medical Research Council. Web site at: <http://www.mrc.ac.uk>.

The **Research & Development Office of the Northern Ireland Health & Social Services** promotes health and wellbeing by encouraging, supporting and investing in high quality research and development. The R&D Office supports research in all the health & social care professions in Northern Ireland and participates in UK-wide schemes such as NPRI. It supports a substantial programme of research in prevention, health promotion and targeting social need.

The Chief Scientist Office (part of the **Scottish Executive Health Department**) supports and promotes high quality research aimed at securing lasting improvements to the health of the people in Scotland, and improve the quality and cost-effectiveness of health services and healthcare in Scotland. CSO commissions work in specific priority areas, supports research initiated by the research community in Scotland, and advises the Scottish Executive Health Department on how research contributes to improvements in health and healthcare. CSO invests approximately £49 million per year in health research.

The **Welsh Assembly Government** is committed to improving the health and wealth of the people of Wales, particularly through prevention and early intervention of disease and disability. This initiative will enable Wales to develop an evidence-based approach to meet these objectives. The Wales Office of Research and Development for Health and Social Care is leading Wales's contribution to this initiative on behalf of the Welsh Assembly Government.

**World Cancer Research Fund (WCRF UK)** is the nation's leading charity dedicated to the *prevention* of cancer. Our mission is to reduce the number of people being diagnosed with cancer each year – both in the UK and worldwide. WCRF UK has over 350,000 supporters across the UK helping the charity to fund research and provide a wide range of education materials. Its first report *Food, Nutrition and the Prevention of Cancer: a global perspective* (1997) represented a milestone in the rapidly emerging field of cancer prevention. As a testimony to its success, well over 30,000 copies have been produced, distributed and sold worldwide. The new report, due to be published in 2006 will act as the most authoritative global report to ever be published on the subject of food, nutrition, physical activity and the prevention of cancer. It will form the basis for the development of a global strategy for cancer prevention and control and will set the agenda for science in the years to come. Website at: <http://www.wcrf-uk.org>.