

National Cancer Research Institute

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NCRI PARTNERS FLAG £5 MILLION FOR CANCER CARE RESEARCH

FUNDS of up to £5 million will be released over the next five years to improve the way cancer care research is carried out in the UK, in response to the findings of a special report by the National Cancer Research Institute (NCRI) published today (Thursday).

The Department of Health, Marie Curie Cancer Care, Macmillan Cancer Relief, the Medical Research Council and Cancer Research UK will jointly fund collaborative research networks in supportive and palliative care in the UK based on the successful model of the NCRI Prostate Cancer Collaboratives.

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

In 2002, the NCRI Strategic Analysis revealed that only 4% of the combined spend of NCRI partners was on supportive and palliative care research.

In response to this, the NCRI partners set up a group chaired by Professor Mike Richards, National Cancer Director, to decide what was needed to stimulate research in this area.

Today's report shows that the research output from the UK in this field is second only to that of the US, but that there is scope for improvement.

The report revealed that the current research workforce is fragmented, and there is inadequate collaboration with researchers outside the field of cancer.

Marie Curie Cancer Care will take the administrative lead for the new initiative, working closely with the other funders.

It is hoped that proposals to stimulate and develop new research across the whole care pathway from diagnosis to end-of-life, and bereavement for carers will be submitted in response to this initiative.

Dr Liam O'Toole, Director of the NCRI, says: "The NCRI funders have worked well together to tackle the challenges facing researchers in this area. The results of research generated through these networks will help contribute towards improving the quality of life of those living with cancer."

Funding will also provide new support for doctoral fellowships to encourage more researchers to stay in this area.

Professor Mike Richards, National Cancer Director, says: "I am delighted that the main research funders have accepted the recommendations in the report and have agreed to provide extra funds to support research in this important area. I believe the proposed research collaboratives will enhance the quality and range of research in this country for the benefit of patients and their families."

Roger Wilson, Chair of the NCRI Consumer Liaison Group, says: "This is a very welcome boost for research, which takes into account the needs of patients. The NCRI partners have sought the active involvement of patients and carers in its partnership, and this initiative is a positive move from which all cancer patients will benefit."

Applications from researchers to establish research collaboratives will be sought in Autumn 2004. Applicants will need to demonstrate a strong commitment to patient involvement, diversity and multi-professional working.

Professor Alex Markham, Chair of the NCRI, says: "The research culture has changed dramatically over the years, and funders are now working together to an increasing extent for the benefit of cancer patients. It is particularly gratifying to see the NCRI partners showing their commitment to the vital field of supportive and palliative care in this way. This aspect of cancer research needs a 'shot in the arm', and the NCRI partners have now provided it."

Sir John Pattison, Director of Research and Development at the Department of Health, says: "This report is very welcome. It is important for supportive and palliative care for cancer patients to be based on good research evidence. The planned NCRI collaborative networks should stimulate researchers from diverse disciplines to pool their skills to address the most burning research questions."

Ends

For media enquiries, please contact Yasmin Khan-Chowdhury in the NCRI's press office on 0207 061 8308 or, out-of-hours, the duty press officer on 07050 264 059.

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 supportive and palliative care as a priority area in 2002, and a special taskforce addressing this issue was set up and reported its findings in July 2004.

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

- the main government cancer research funders: the Medical Research Council, and the Health Departments of England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, 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 ABPI.

Research collaboratives aim to link separate research groups, often affiliated to different organisations and at different locations, so that their work and results can be shared and developed further.