

National Cancer Research Institute

61 Lincoln's Inn Fields
PO Box 123 London WC2A 3PX
Tel: +44 (0)20 7061 8460
Fax: +44(0)20 7061 8461
info@ncri.org.uk
www.ncri.org.uk



CONTACT:
NCRI Press Office
press@ncri.org.uk

NEW NETWORK TO BOOST RADIOTHERAPY RESEARCH IN THE UK

A new network to help modernise radiotherapy research throughout the UK is being launched today (Monday) which will bring a host of benefits to cancer patients.

A National Cancer Research Institute (NCRI) initiative, the new Academic Clinical Oncology and Radiobiology Research Network (ACORRN), will create a world-class coordinated network of researchers to increase vital research opportunities.

Jointly funded by Cancer Research UK, the Medical Research Council and the Department of Health, this is the first time a long-term radiotherapy research strategy will be developed for the UK.

The network hopes to attract long-term funding and develop improved training opportunities for professionals to remain in radiotherapy research. ACORRN will also support independent radiotherapy researchers and research groups throughout the UK and raise the profile of radiotherapy research.

Over the last ten years, a sharp decline in the number of clinical academics and radiation biologists has left the radiotherapy and radiobiology communities with insufficient numbers to respond to the Department of Health's need to develop and capitalise on the rapid technological advances that allow more accurate radiotherapy delivery.

In 2002, the NCRI identified the strengths and weaknesses in radiotherapy and radiobiology research in the UK, and this led to the proposal of setting up ACORRN to advance these research areas in the UK.

Professor Pat Price, Chair of ACORRN says: "Over the last ten years radiotherapy has seen one of the most rapid advances in technology and computerisation in any field of medicine. This, combined with advances in cell and molecular biology, means that now radiotherapy research has the potential to be one of the most dynamic and clinically relevant fields."

She adds: "For the first time researchers can all work together to exploit this great potential."

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ACORRN will encourage networking and research collaboration through an interactive website, and provide advice and practical assistance on funding, grant applications, ethics legislation and approval. All related professions such as clinicians, scientists, radiographers and physicists, plus clinical trainees will be encouraged to get involved. The network will work in partnership with the UK research community to rebuild a strong radiotherapy base.

Dr Jane Cope, NCRI Administrative Director says: "This is an exciting step forward for the radiotherapy and radiobiology communities. In the UK, 50 per cent of cancer patients are treated with radiotherapy at some point, and it's these patients who will ultimately benefit from this initiative."

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For media enquiries please contact:

Yasmin Khan on 020 7061 8308 or, out-of-hours, the duty press officer on 07050 264 059

Dr Jo Cresswell, Acting ACORRN Network Manager on 0161 446 8268 or e-mail acorrn@manchester.ac.uk

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 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.

Cancer Research UK, the Medical Research Council and the Department of Health have provided joint funding of £350,000 over the next three years.

The NCRI *Report of The Radiotherapy and Related Radiobiology Progress Review Group* (available <http://www.ncri.org.uk/publications/index.cfm?NavSub=20>) in January 2003

reported only 6 per cent of the annual combined spend of NCRI Partners was spent on this area of research.

ACORRN is UK-wide initiative, and researchers and academics in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and England interested in participating in this initiative, or wanting more information, should contact the ACORRN Network Manager at the Christie Hospital in Manchester on 0161 446 8279, e-mail acornn@manchester.ac.uk or visit www.acornn.org.