

PRESS RELEASE
Monday 9 October, 2006



NCRI

National
Cancer
Research
Institute

NATIONAL CANCER RESEARCH INSTITUTE UNVEILS SEVENTEEN NEW EXPERIMENTAL CANCER MEDICINE CENTRES

A major network of Experimental Cancer Medicine Centres (ECMC) across the UK is announced today at the National Cancer Research Institute (NCRI) Cancer Conference, with a funding boost of £35 million from Cancer Research UK and the Departments of Health in England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales.

An international review panel awarded grants to seventeen centres based on their scientific and clinical excellence. They will each receive around £2 million over the next five years to drive new anti-cancer treatments to patients.

The centres are: Barts and the London, Birmingham, Belfast, Cambridge, Cardiff, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Imperial College, Institute of Cancer Research, King's College London, Leeds-Bradford-Hull-York, Leicester, Manchester, Newcastle, Oxford, Southampton and University College London. Two further centres, Liverpool and Sheffield, will be under development and will receive grants of around £150,000 each year.

This major expansion and development will support world-class translational research across the UK – ensuring basic science discoveries are developed into treatments for cancer patients as quickly as possible. The substantial increase in funding will ensure that the UK remains at the forefront of international efforts to develop new treatments for cancer.

The initiative is being developed under the umbrella of the National Cancer Research Institute (NCRI) and will be fully coordinated with the UK Clinical Research Collaboration's (UKCRC) activities in experimental medicine outside cancer.

The network will build on the successful work of the Departments of Health-funded National Translational Cancer Research Network (NTRAC). NTRAC was established in 2002 as part of the National Cancer Plan to help facilitate translational cancer research in the NHS.

The funding will cover clinical, laboratory and NHS infrastructure costs enabling centres to bring together laboratory and clinical research, sharing knowledge and resources for the benefit of cancer patients. The funds will underpin the translational work needed to develop new anti-cancer drugs and diagnostics from the laboratory into clinics and then to test them in early clinical trials.

Professor Herbie Newell, director of translational research at Cancer Research UK, who will oversee the running of the network, said: "This initiative will provide the vital infrastructure to help laboratory scientists, clinicians, nurses and support staff accelerate research that benefits patients. This investment will promote research into the development of new drugs and test individualisation of patient care over the next five years.

"Cancer Research UK and its NCRI partners are well placed to exploit the opportunities presented by the basic science strengths and clinical research expertise in the UK. We aim to build upon the proven success of the NTRAC centres to manage a highly efficient network of Experimental Cancer Medicine Centres."

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Health Minister Andy Burnham welcomed today's announcement: "Significant progress has been made in improving cancer services since the launch of the Cancer Plan six years ago. Cancer death rates are falling across the board. We are not complacent though and this important investment in experimental cancer medicine means that cancer patients will receive faster access to improved, safer treatments and the highest quality patient care. It demonstrates the commitment of the Government and key partners to work together to establish the UK as a world leader in clinical research. The NHS plays a vital role in translating medical advances from the laboratory bench to the patient's bedside. This initiative is an essential step that will ultimately lead to improving the care we offer cancer patients and the public."

Professor Sally Davies, director of research and development for the Department of Health, said: "This initiative is dedicating vital funding to develop new treatments for cancer patients and this substantial investment in experimental medicine underpins our commitment to this important area of research. We are delighted to support this initiative through the provision of essential NHS infrastructure funding."

Dr Alison Spaul from the Chief Scientist's Office at the Scottish Executive said: "We are delighted that Cancer Research UK is making this significant investment into experimental cancer medicine. The Scottish Executive is committed to increasing the number of patients involved in clinical trials and this initiative will go some way to help achieve this ambition as well as improving patient care."

Professor John Williams, director of the Wales Office of Research and Development, Welsh Assembly Government, said: "Making the leap from discovering a medicine that looks promising in the laboratory to testing it in patients is extremely challenging, and this initiative will ensure scientists and doctors have the resources they need to enable this critical area of research to prosper."

Professor Bob Stout, director of research and development for Northern Ireland Health and Personal Social Services, said: "Northern Ireland is delighted to be part of this pioneering initiative that will enable patients to receive new and better treatments for cancer sooner."

Dr Jane Cope, director of the NCRI, said: "This funding will ensure that innovative cancer research in the UK has the support and infrastructure in place to allow basic science discoveries to benefit patients in the clinic as fast as possible. The network of centres across the UK will allow for best practice and knowledge to be shared for the benefit of patients, and we look forward to seeing the results of this important investment in years to come."

ENDS

For media enquiries please contact Emma Gilgunn-Jones on 020 7061 8300 or, out-of-hours, the duty press officer on 07050 264 059.

NOTES FOR EDITORS

Experimental medicine is defined as investigation undertaken in human beings to identify mechanisms of pathophysiology or disease and to test the validity and importance of new discoveries or treatments.

Each of the new Experimental Cancer Medicine Centres will be known as a "Cancer Research UK/Department of Health (or equivalent in the devolved regions) Centre for Experimental Cancer Medicine". Full ECMC status and funding have been awarded to seventeen centres of scientific and clinical excellence in translational cancer research: Barts and the London, Birmingham, Belfast, Cambridge, Cardiff, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Imperial College, Institute of Cancer Research, King's College London, Leeds-Bradford-Hull-York, Leicester, Manchester, Newcastle, Oxford, Southampton, University College London. Centres in Liverpool and Sheffield have been designated Experimental Cancer Medicine Centres in Development.

Each centre will receive around £2m funding over 5 years to help build the research infrastructure and workforce capability needed to fast-track basic research for patient benefit. The centres under development will receive around £150,000 each year. The funding will commence in April 2007.

Cancer Research UK

Together with its partners and supporters, Cancer Research UK's vision is to beat cancer.

- Cancer Research UK carries out world-class research to improve understanding of the disease and find out how to prevent, diagnose and treat different kinds of cancer.
- Cancer Research UK ensures that its findings are used to improve the lives of all cancer patients.
- Cancer Research UK helps people to understand cancer, the progress that is being made and the choices each person can make.
- Cancer Research UK works in partnership with others to achieve the greatest impact in the global fight against cancer.

For further information about Cancer Research UK's work or to find out how to support the charity, please call 020 7009 8820 or visit www.cancerresearchuk.org.uk.

Department of Health

The Department of Health's budget for health research for 2006-07 is £753m. Of this, £50m is allocated for capital funding; the rest is allocated to research through a portfolio of national research programmes. The funding supports clinical research in the NHS, research commissioned for policy development, and the NHS costs incurred in supporting research funded by other bodies such as the Research Councils and charities. Some funding is provided to increase capacity to undertake research, and to underpin the UK Clinical Research Collaboration and priority disease research networks.

UK Clinical Research Collaboration (UKCRC)

The UKCRC is a partnership of organisations united by the shared aim of establishing the position of the UK as a world leader in clinical research, by harnessing the power of the NHS. The Collaboration was established in response to the growing concerns that the UK was not fully realising the clinical research potential offered by the NHS and brings together the major stakeholders that influence the clinical research environment in the UK. The partnership includes representatives from the main funding bodies for clinical research in the UK, academic medicine, the NHS, regulatory bodies, representatives from industry and patients.

The UKCRC was launched in April 2004 and has five main areas of activity:

- Building up the infrastructure in the NHS
- Developing Incentives for Research in the NHS
- Building up the Research Workforce
- Streamlining the Regulatory and Governance Processes
- Co-ordinating Clinical Research Funding

NOTES FOR EDITORS

The NCRI

The National Cancer Research Institute (NCRI) was established in April 2001. It is a partnership between government, the voluntary sector and the private sector, with the primary mission of maximising patient benefit that accrues from cancer research in the UK through coordination of effort and joint planning towards an integrated national strategy for cancer research.

The NCRI consists of: The Association of British Pharmaceutical Industry (ABPI); The Association for International Cancer Research; The Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council; Breakthrough Breast Cancer; Breast Cancer Campaign; Cancer Research UK; Department of Health; Economic and Social Research Council; Leukaemia Research Fund; Ludwig Institute for Cancer Research; Macmillan Cancer Support; Marie Curie Cancer Care; The Medical Research Council; The Welsh Assembly Government; Northern Ireland Health and Personal Social Services Research & Development Office; Roy Castle Lung Cancer Foundation; Scottish Executive Health Department; Tenovus; The Wellcome Trust and Yorkshire Cancer Research.

AstraZeneca is the gold sponsor for the NCRI Cancer Conference 2006.