

Friday 17 July 2009

NEW ONLINE PORTAL FOR CANCER RESEARCHERS UNVEILED

The National Cancer Research Institute's free online cancer research portal, ONIX, has launched to the public today.

ONIX (ONcology Information eXchange) enables scientists and clinicians to search through and access international research data held online – to improve the flow of cancer research information between individuals, institutions and organisations.

The portal (<http://www.ncri-onix.org.uk/>) is free-to-use and uses powerful search technology – which significantly reduces the time it currently takes for scientists and clinicians to find cancer-related data and information across the spectrum of research from genomics to clinical trials. This reduces duplication of research effort across the globe and makes it easier for researchers to collaborate on similar studies. It will speed up the development of new therapies, and could potentially improve prognosis and diagnosis.

It provides a unique integrated research environment online - the gateway to cancer research.

Scientists and clinicians can simultaneously search through multiple cancer-related databases, and track the latest developments in the field - what research is being carried out by which researchers - and where. Most importantly, when users carry out a search on ONIX, they receive the search results in a clear usable format.

The demand for a system such as ONIX is greater than ever. In the last 10 years the amount of health-related data available in electronic format has ballooned due to the vast volumes of data generated by modern molecular research techniques.

The scale of this data and the fact that – to date - it has been stored in many different formats and locations has meant that it is almost impossible for individual researchers to use this

information effectively.

Professor Sir Alex Markham, who has been leading the development of ONIX, on behalf of NCRI, said: “ONIX represents a major advance for cancer research in the UK. I urge all cancer researchers, whether basic scientists, clinical researchers or pre-clinical medical students, to register with ONIX, explore the system in depth and continue to use it over the coming months and years.

“Researchers can use it to pull out specific, relevant data from the haystack of information out there – really saving them valuable time. As a result researchers will be better connected with the latest projects, data and updates from institutions in the field of cancer. What you see now is just the beginning – the system will eventually become a one-stop resource for online cancer research.”

ONIX will be further refined - driven by user feedback. The NCRI will continue to develop the system – by adding more content, including databases, information about cancer-related organisations and resources. And improved functionality of ONIX will enable researchers to do more with these resources and information.

An ‘Intelligent’ search feature is being developed which interprets the language used in search terms - called semantic searching. This enables researchers to find highly specific cancer-related information whilst eliminating irrelevant search results..

The NCRI Informatics project is collaborating with a number of UK projects including the National Cancer Intelligence Network (NCIN) and the NHS Connecting for Health Research Capability Programme (RCP). The collaboration will allow researchers to access electronic summaries of the data held by these organisations in a secure way – and with appropriate authorisation researchers will be able to access and retrieve protected data.

Professor Sir Kenneth Calman, chair of the NCRI, said: “The NCRI partners are pleased to support the launch and continued development of ONIX. The role of ONIX in connecting resources and information, and streamlining research supports the key principles of high-level coordination that the NCRI aims to achieve. I am optimistic that ONIX will provide a research tool of significant benefit to both cancer researchers and cancer patients alike”.

For more information about ONIX visit www.cancerinformatics.org.uk.

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

The Oncology Information Exchange (ONIX)

- The NCRI ONIX is an internet portal aimed at clinical cancer researchers, clinicians, bioinformaticians and health informaticians from both public and private sectors. It provides resources and information on all aspects of global cancer research - from genomics to clinical trials.
- The initiative is managed by the National Cancer Research Institute (NCRI), through the NCRI Informatics Initiative, established in 2003, to ensure that all research data generated achieves impact and is put to maximum use by the cancer research community.
- The Oncology Information Exchange is funded by the NCRI Partners and Industry.
- The service will launch in summer 2009 and be further developed until at least March 2010.

About the NCRI

The National Cancer Research Institute (NCRI) was established in April 2001. It is a UK-wide partnership between the government, charity and industry which promotes co-operation in cancer research among the 21 member organisations for the benefit of patients, the public and the scientific community.

www.ncri.org.uk

NCRI members are: the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry (ABPI); Association for International Cancer Research; Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council; Breakthrough Breast Cancer; Breast Cancer Campaign; Cancer Research UK; CHILDREN with LEUKAEMIA, Department of Health; Economic and Social Research Council; Leukaemia Research; Ludwig Institute for Cancer Research; Macmillan Cancer Support; Marie Curie Cancer Care; Medical Research Council; Northern Ireland Health and Social Care (Research & Development Office); Roy Castle Lung Cancer Foundation; Scottish Government Health Directorates (Chief Scientist Office); Tenovus; Welsh Assembly Government (Wales Office of Research and Development for Health & Social Care); The Wellcome Trust; and Yorkshire Cancer Research.