



CANCER RECOGNISED RESEARCH GROUP

NEWSLETTER

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Special points of interest:

- CRRG Annual Retreat 22nd September 2006 at Comfort Hotel.
- RRG Website launch. To include articles of relevance contact Professor SR McKeown (sr.mckeown@ulster.ac.uk).
- NCRI Cancer Conference, 8-11 Oct 2006; <http://www.ncri.org.uk/ncriconference/>
- Association for Radiation Research (ARR) meeting, Belfast 3rd - 5th April 2007; <http://www.gci.ac.uk/usr/arr/home.html>

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Foreword Professor FC Campbell Chair, Cancer RRG 2005-2007

While cancer affects diverse groups in all regions of the UK, the Northern Ireland population has special needs by virtue of its particularly high cancer incidence and outcomes that were until recently, among the worst in Europe. With a prescient approach, the Northern Ireland Research and Development Office recognized the improved opportunities for accelerating the prevention, control, early detection, diagnosis, and effective treatment of cancer to be obtained from high quality fundamental and clinical research. On this basis, the Cancer

Recognised Research Group (RRG) was founded Northern Ireland in 2000 by a strategy of targeting research funding to essential health issues and productive research groups. The Cancer RRG has been judged to be highly successful by external peer review and has fostered a network of international cancer researchers based in the two universities, linked to the major hospitals and their staff, within Northern Ireland. Indeed, the focus of research funding has already associated with a real improvement of cancer treatment outcomes within the Province, with the promise of further substantive gains. The success of the strategy has been recognised by the R&D office by their continued support for the RRG concept which is now a vital component of Northern Ireland healthcare and science.

The current issue of the Newsletter highlights a number of important events for the forthcoming year. Dr Tracy Robson describes the significant development of the "Gene-Library" which is an all-Ireland "Biobank", that will greatly facilitate study of genetic influences and gene-environment interactions

relating to specific diseases including the diverse categories of Cancer. Professor Stephanie McKeown gives an account of the excellent contribution made by young Northern Ireland Scientists at the National Cancer Research Institute meeting in Birmingham in 2005. The CRRG Annual Retreat will be held on 22nd September 2006 at the Comfort Hotel, Antrim will provide a high quality scientific forum for research and education, to which all Associate and Principal investigators and their teams are very welcome. We look forward to seeing you there. The new RRG website will be launched by Professor McKeown and will provide a focal point for information, policy, news and general articles of relevance.

Finally, in the first 5 years of its existence, the Cancer RRG has generated great excitement across the cancer community, with continued advances in key research areas, paving the way for translation and novel treatment. Collaborative efforts of basic science laboratories, the R & D Office, Hospital Trusts, Charities and voluntary organizations has helped us all to focus our limited resources, on key areas. With this background, it is timely to consider our strategy for the next 5 years, where I have sought to highlight those areas likely to yield a high return. Cancer mortality began to fall in the early 1990s and its decline continues today. We anticipate that our future studies of this varied and complex disease, will accelerate its rate of decline within our population.

Gene Library Ireland

Dr Tracy Robson

The R&D Office, Belfast and the Health Research Board, Dublin, are aiming to establish an all-island 'biobank', to help researchers study the effects that genes play in a host of different diseases. The proposed library will have DNA, blood and possibly urine samples collected from 10,000 healthy

individuals, along with information on their health, lifestyle and environment. It is proposed that this 'control' group of samples could be used for comparison with samples from a group of diseased individuals, allowing researchers to conduct their studies quickly, efficiently and avoiding duplication of effort.

A number of meetings both in Dublin and in Belfast have been held to examine the merits and feasibility of establishing such a bank. Both the R&D Office and the HRB are anxious that they gain as much feedback as possible, in particular from research groups already using such samples in their own studies. Further information can be found at: <http://www.hrb.ie/>. In order to give feedback, the Cancer RRG community should visit this site and complete the questionnaire, so that issues regarding collection of samples that might aid our understanding of the role in genes for example in cancer predisposition are addressed in a timely manner.

A further opportunity is likely to become available in the near future to get involved with identifying the criteria for selection of control groups and also the questions asked in the health questionnaire to accompany the sample collection. Those in the cancer research community who are currently looking for information on healthy normals should signify their interest to CRRG chair (f.c.campbell@qub.ac.uk). This is a great opportunity for specific projects to influence the setting up of this project. Prof. Campbell will inform you when the next meeting will be.

Young Scientists present at the first NCRI workshop

Professor SR McKeown

As many of you are aware there is now a much more co-ordinated approach to cancer research in the UK; this is primarily organised through the NCRI (National Cancer Research Institute). As part of this initiative the first NCRI conference was held in the autumn in

the International Convention Centre in Birmingham. This was an excellent meeting with many top quality internationally recognised speakers. The programme was very varied and interests of the whole cancer research scientific community from bench scientists to patient advocates were catered for.

The R & D office and the Cancer RRG jointly sponsored a workshop highlighting the work of young scientists from Northern Ireland. The theme of the session was 'Molecular Targeting in Cancer' and it was lead by an excellent talk by Prof Steve Jackson, University of Cambridge, who showed how an understanding of molecular targets in tumours can lead to the development of effective drugs that are currently being trialled in the clinic. This was followed by talks from the NI young scientists. *Dr Dan Longley* discussed c-FLIP_L which he has identified as a useful predictive marker of response to drugs used in the treatment of colorectal cancer. He suggested that targeting c-FLIP, either alone, or in combination with existing chemotherapies may have therapeutic potential for the treatment of colorectal cancer. *Dr Andrea Valentine* discussed a novel gene, DIR-1, which interacts with Hsp90. Targeting the DIR-1 pathway either alone, or in combination with current therapies, may enhance cancer treatment. *Luciano Lucas* described a method for studying the effects of the anti-angiogenic agent angiostatin. This compound inhibits tumour vascularisation and invasion and can be used to control tumour growth with almost no toxicity. The final talk was given by *Chris Watson* who was investigating the importance of p53 and Fas on the response to chemotherapy of bladder tumours. He provided some novel data on the role of Fas in the enhancement of the therapeutic response to mitomycin C.

The workshop was well attended. All of the speakers appreciated the opportunity to present their work and to attend the conference. The audience were very

complimentary about the work presented by our young scientists and thought it was a great opportunity to showcase cancer research in Northern Ireland. It is hoped that another themed workshop will be run at the 2nd annual meeting scheduled for 8th – 11th October 2006.



