

# **BRAVE NEW FUTURE FOR CANCER RESEARCH**

A PIONEERING initiative to create a virtual community of researchers with access to a vast array of previously unavailable scientific data is launched tomorrow (Thursday) in the journal *Nature*.

The international enterprise forms part of a grand vision – labelled the Strategic Framework - to revolutionise medical science by fostering a new era of cooperation and information exchange.

The UK's National Cancer Research Institute (NCRI) will outline its plans in a special statement in the journal, backed by many of the world's leading cancer organisations, including the US National Cancer Institute.

There have been dramatic advances across medical research in recent years, in areas as diverse as genomics, proteomics, and clinical trials. Scientists are generating more data than ever before, up to 80 per cent of which remains unpublished and unanalysed. Furthermore, one scientist's data is rarely compatible with another's, making it very hard for different research groups to exchange information.

The NCRI – umbrella body of the UK's main cancer funding bodies, including the Government, Cancer Research UK, the Medical Research Council and the Wellcome Trust – recognises the need for faster, better ways of accessing, analysing and disseminating research data to accelerate the development of better cancer treatments. Informatics is already becoming integral to biomedical research and has the potential to revolutionise cancer medicine in the future from the ways drugs are developed to the way they are used in the clinic.

Through the NCRI, scientists in different fields of cancer research will aim to reach agreement on how best to record data in areas as different as epidemiology, genomics and medical imaging, making it accessible to the wider research community.

Central to the initiative is building upon existing strengths and expertise. In order to achieve this vision, a Task Force comprised of experts from across the cancer informatics spectrum will be established to implement the initiative and advise the NCRI partners. Professor Richard Begent, a world-renowned medical oncologist, has been invited to Chair the Task Force.

An Informatics Coordination Unit has been established to act as a point of contact with the community and they are compiling a map of current activity in the form of an online planning matrix ([www.cancerinformatics.org.uk](http://www.cancerinformatics.org.uk)).

Professor Alex Markham, Chief Executive of Cancer Research UK and current Chairman of the NCRI, says: “At the moment, there’s such a baffling array of data being generated that scientists simply can’t keep up, and up to 80 per cent of the available information is never finding its way into the public domain.

“For the good of cancer patients worldwide, we need to make the best possible use of every pound spent on research and that means making scientific results available.

“Our vision is to create a culture of data exchange to bring scientists together in a virtual community, where data can be shared in a format that everyone will understand. We want to make sure that new discoveries will spread outwards throughout the cancer research community much more quickly than happens now, speeding the process of understanding cancer and developing new treatments.

Dr Andrew von Eschenbach, Director of the US National Cancer Institute, says: “NCI is dedicated to helping form a community that openly shares scientific data and information management tools so that everyone can work more effectively and reduce the time it takes to develop new cancer interventions”

“NCRI’s initiative will complement our Cancer Bioinformatics Grid (CaBIG), which is being developed by NCI in partnership with NCI supported Cancer Centers, and private sector companies, as an open source, common standards research platform. CaBIG and NCRI will play an essential role in accelerating our ability to eliminate suffering and death due to cancer

The NCRI Framework will encourage scientists to come together as a community to address these issues.

Dr Liam O’Toole, Administrative Director of the NCRI, says: “This is an ambitious project which requires the community to embrace cultural change in order to maximise the results of research and enable us to do science which would not otherwise be possible.

“At every stage of a research project, we are encouraging scientists to think about how their results can be shared with colleagues elsewhere in a way that is easily understandable to others. Our website and its matrix will provide a forum for scientists to talk together in a common language.”

Ends

## 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 an overall strategy for cancer research in the UK and co-ordinating activities between member organisations.

The NCRI Board identified cancer informatics as a priority area in 2002 and the NCRI Cancer Research Informatics Coordination Unit was established in March 2003. Further information about the Unit, initiative and copies of the Framework document can be found at [www.cancerinformatics.org.uk](http://www.cancerinformatics.org.uk).

A “Strategic Framework for the Development of Cancer Research Informatics in the UK” was put together and the aim of this is to enable the creation of an internationally compatible informatics platform in the UK that facilitates access to and integrated analysis of data generated from research funded by NCRI Partner organisations, across the spectrum from genomic data to data generated from clinical trials and large-scale epidemiological data. This will maximise the impact of the results of research funded by NCRI Partner organisations for the benefit of cancer patients by ensuring that data generated through research is put to maximum use by the cancer research community.

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 cancer research charities: Cancer Research UK; The Wellcome Trust, Ludwig Institute, Marie Curie Institute, 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.

Further information regarding the NCI CaBIG initiative can be found at <http://caBIG.nci.nih.gov>.

For media enquiries, please contact Richard Hoey in Cancer Research UK's press office on 0207 061 8300/8308 or, out-of-hours, the duty press officer on 07050 264 059.