



Proceedings of the
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NCI All Ireland Cancer Agreement: An Auspicious Beginning

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In October 1999 the National Cancer Institute signed an historic Agreement with the Departments of Health in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. (Fig. 1). This Agreement forged a strategic alliance between Ireland (North and South) and the United States to improve clinical cancer services, and patient care and to promote and foster North/South collaboration in cancer research and development. This strategic agreement between the United States and Ireland North and South was marked by a signing ceremony at Stormont Parliament Buildings in Belfast where 500 people gathered, including political representatives, physicians, scientific researchers, and research nurses to witness this important event and the official establishment of the Ireland/Northern Ireland NCI Cancer Consortium. The meeting was chaired by former U.S. Senate Majority Leader and the Chancellor of

Queen's University of Belfast, *Senator George Mitchell*, who opened the event by commenting: "There is the potential for this work to bring both parts of Ireland and the United States together to actively participate in a common cause that has the potential to benefit people across the social spectrum."

The decision by the National Cancer Institute to develop an NCI All Ireland Agreement for cancer research and development on the Island of Ireland is a major boost for the developing cancer programs on the Island and will no doubt help the process of the redevelopment of cancer services in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

Cancer is a major cause of mortality and morbidity in Ireland. Currently there are approximately 28,000 new cases of cancer diagnosed each year and approximately 11,000 die from cancer. Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland

have one of the highest incidence and mortality rates for cancer in the Western world. Over the last five years there has been a major restructuring in development of cancer services in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland as a result of several Governmental Reports. Therefore, this is an opportune time to have the



Figure 1. The Signing of the Memorandum of Understanding—Ireland/Northern Ireland/NCI Cancer Consortium. See page 387 for name legend.

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expertise of the National Cancer Institute brought to bear on the cancer problem in Ireland. While the scope of the Agreement will evolve over time, several initial projects are now to be implemented. These include the:

- Enhancement and co-ordination of tumor registries in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland;
- Enhancement of informatics infrastructure to support coordinated clinical trials throughout Ireland; and
- Development of education, training and scholarship exchange.

New programs will be developed as appropriate and will include the establishment of appropriate partnerships, advocacy groups, non-governmental organizations and industry. These collaborative programs within the Consortium will be administered by a Governing Board comprised of representatives of the three Governments through the Department of Health and Children (Ireland), Department of Health & Social Services (Northern Ireland), and the National Cancer Institute.

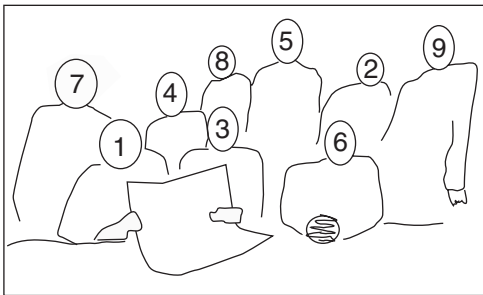
The Signing Ceremony at Stormont launched a three-day Cancer Conference in Belfast that featured more than 80 speakers from the United States, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, and the United Kingdom. The Irish

media provided extensive coverage of the Conference, including special reports on key aspects and presentations. More than 600 physicians, researchers, nurses, and representatives from industry participated in the Conference in an effort to define the current scope and breadth of research in cancer care provided in the respective countries, to share research findings and to suggest ways in which collaboration may be beneficial for the future.

The following articles outline some of the key presentations at the NCI All Ireland Conference and highlight the potential that can be achieved when cancer researchers link together beyond boundaries for a common good.




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For the Republic of Ireland: 1) Mr. Brian Cowan, T.D., Minister of Health and Children; 2) Dr. James Kiely, Chief Medical Officer, Department of Health and Children.

For Northern Ireland: 3) Mr. George Howarth, M.P., Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Northern Ireland Office of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland; 4) D. Henrietta Campbell, Chief Medical Officer, Department of Health and Social Services.

For the United States: 5) Dr. Harold Varmus, Director, National Institutes of Health; 6) Dr. Richard Klausner, Director, National Cancer Institute

(NCI); Dr. Edison Liu, Director, Division of Clinical Sciences, NCI; 8) The Hon. George Mitchell, former U.S. Senate Majority Leader and honorary chancellor of The Queen's University of Belfast; 9) Senator Connie Mack, U.S. Senate.

PUBLISHER'S NOTE:

The Oncologist will publish additional manuscripts from the NCI All Ireland Cancer Conference in the next issue.