

All-Ireland Cancer Conference

The NCRI hosted this year's all-Ireland Cancer Conference in Cork, Ireland—a very successful event with over 400 delegates and fifty speakers from Ireland, the US and Britain who presented on a wide range of topics. (See page 41 for more details.)

Training

Epidemiology Fellows

The first two Cancer Epidemiology Fellows ended their fellowships at the Irish registries at the end of 2003. These fellowships have been very successful for both the fellows and the registries. Both fellows succeeded in obtaining senior positions in cancer epidemiology on the island of Ireland: Dr Peter McCarron through the Public Health Career Scientist Award at the Department of Epidemiology and Public Health at Queens University Belfast and Dr Paul Walsh as a senior lecturer grade epidemiologist at the National Cancer Registry in Cork. Dr McCarron will work with the cancer registry on prostate cancer screening and early life influences in cancer, while Dr Walsh will work on a Department of Health-sponsored study of patterns of care and outcomes in cancer. The two fellows have been invaluable research resources for the registries and valuable links with the research teams at NCI.

Dr Deirdre Cronin, a third Epidemiology Fellow, began work at the National Cancer Registry (Ireland) in April. In June, she joined Dr Brenda Edwards' team at NCI. Drs Comber and Edwards

planned a comprehensive programme of education and experience for Dr Cronin's year at NCI. In 2003, Dr Cronin attended a number of courses at Johns Hopkins University and at NCI, and participated in meetings of the International Association for Cryptologic Research (IACR) and North American Association of Central Cancer Registries (NAACCR).

Certified Tumour Registrar Qualification

The NCRI became involved in a project with NCI and the US Center for Disease Control (CDC) to provide international certification of tumour registrars. Outside the United States, there are few formal programmes leading to a qualification or certification of tumour registrars. It is our hope that the result of this project will be an internationally recognized certificate.

Prevention Course

As in previous years, staff from both cancer registries attended the Summer Prevention courses at NCI. Dr Anna Gavin, Director of the Northern Ireland Cancer Registry, and Lesley Anderson, a doctoral student with the FINBAR project, were among the staff participants.

CLINICAL TRIALS NETWORK

Clinical Trials Working Group efforts focus on strengthening island of Ireland cancer centre capacity to conduct cancer clinical trials. The Group works to maximize Ireland and Northern Ireland collaboration with each other and with international entities to increase the number of

clinical trials participants and improve patient access to new therapies.

The overarching goal for the Consortium, outlined in the MOU in 1999 (see Appendix), is to foster the provision of better prevention, early detection, and treatment of cancer for all people on the island of Ireland. A large part of achieving this goal involves enabling people with cancer to gain access to clinical trials.

Northern Ireland, under the Campbell Commission, led by Chief Medical Officer Henrietta Campbell, now has a cancer centre based at Belfast City Hospital and one cancer unit in each of the its four regional health boards—Altnagelvin, Antrim, Ulster, and Craigavon Hospitals. Belfast City Hospital serves as the coordinating hub of this activity, providing a setting for support and interaction of the research staff, which includes administrative staff, data managers, a research radiographer, and seven clinical research nurses.

The Republic of Ireland, through its Health Research Board (HRB), is currently funding nine hospitals in to enhance their capacity to conduct high-quality clinical trials. St. Vincent’s University Hospital/St. Luke’s Hospital, Cork University Hospital, Galway University College Hospital, Beaumont Hospital, St. James’s Hospital, and Mater Misericordiae Hospital, are all in receipt of awards over an initial three-year period. Limerick Regional Hospital, the Adelaide and Meath,

incorporating the National Children’s Hospital Tallaght (AMNCH), and Waterford Regional Hospital are in receipt of smaller planning awards over two years to enable them to begin making progress and to compete more effectively in subsequent calls under this initiative.

With the launch of the All Island Cancer Clinical Trials Cooperative Group in 2003, resulting in the provision of organisational, statistical, and scientific support to member hospitals, it is hoped that this network of funded hospitals can advance the objective of generating and conducting cancer clinical trials consistent with priorities in Ireland and Northern Ireland.

All-Island Cooperative Group

With Consortium Board of Directors members in attendance, the All-Island Cancer Clinical Trials Cooperative Group was formally launched on 8 February 2003 at the Royal College of Surgeons in Dublin. The Irish Clinical Oncology Research Group (ICORG), based in Dublin, and the Clinical Research Support Centre (CRSC), based in Belfast, collaborated to form the coordinating body and to provide data and statistical management for the “network” of cancer centres across the island of Ireland.

Speaking at the launch, NCI Director Dr von Eschenbach noted that such networks had played a pivotal role in the United States in delivering new forms of treatment for cancer. He also congratulated Dr John Armstrong, Chair of

ICORG, and Dr Karen Bailie, Director of the CRSC, for their foresight and hard work in forming the All-Island Cancer Clinical Trials Cooperative Group.

The Cooperative Group is jointly funded under the Consortium by the HRB in Dublin and the Research and Development (R&D) Office in Belfast. In 2003, the Group was awarded a € 1 million two-year planning grant to begin its work. Its principal role is to initiate and coordinate clinical trials in cancer hospitals on the island of Ireland.

With the relatively small population on the island of Ireland (approximately 5.4 million), it is essential that the two jurisdictions collaborate with one another, Europe and the United States to create a pool of participants large enough to complete trials in a timely fashion. However, to participate in multi-centre clinical trials, organisations must demonstrate the requisite sophistication to recruit suitable patient populations, administer the complex therapies, and track the huge volumes of data. It is hoped that the establishment of the Cooperative Group, working closely with the network of cancer hospitals, will lead to all-island participation in trials, increased competition for trials on an international level, and thus improvement of patients' access to new cancer therapies.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY SHARING

The Information Technology Working Group focuses on enhancing information technologies across the island of Ireland to support coordinated clinical trials; facilitate training and education; ensure effective data management; and promote health care delivery. The Working Group includes six members from the three partnering jurisdictions.

In January, the first TELESYNERGY® User Group meeting was held in Bethesda, Maryland. Participants came from Belfast and Dublin, and also from NCI, Wheeling, West Virginia and Fort Lauderdale, Florida to explore objectives in three broad areas: education and training; clinical trials; and technical usage. The Group discussed the next state of development of TELESYNERGY® as its use continues to evolve and expand on the island of Ireland. TELESYNERGY® has been used for multidisciplinary meetings and conferences; educational programmes; research, radiation therapy, and nursing exchanges; and clinical case discussions within the island of Ireland. Potential uses of and advances in TELESYNERGY® include radiation oncology. Two research projects were funded in Dublin to further examine this functionality.

The TELESYNERGY® system is being further developed with refinement of the optical microscopy function to enable real-time display of specialized cytogenetics including fluorescent in-