

NEW INITIATIVES

In partnership with the DoHC of Ireland and the DHSSPS of Northern Ireland, the Consortium remains committed to reducing cancer incidence and improving the quality of cancer care on the island of Ireland. To these ends, the Consortium sponsors a number of programs, activities, and initiatives intended to promote cancer research and educate the scientific, public health, and policy-making communities. In accordance with the 2006 renewal of the MOU, Consortium activities in 2007 increased to include health economics/cancer policy analysis and biobanking. The Consortium continued its involvement in efforts to establish a National Cancer Biobank for Ireland and to expand research capacity in health economics and cancer policy analysis through the All-Ireland Health Economics Workshop and the HRB/NCI Health Economics Fellowships in Cancer Program.

BIOBANKING

In recent years, scientists have identified distinct associations between disease subtypes and variations in environment, lifestyle, and genetic predisposition. Because this emerging method of research has the potential to entirely alter the medical approach to cancer diagnosis and treatment, the Consortium has added biobanking, the collection and analysis of human tissue samples, as a primary area of support.

■ EXPERT GROUP ON A NATIONAL CANCER BIOBANK FOR IRELAND

In 2007, the Minister of the DoHC of Ireland, Mary Harney, T.D., nominated an Expert Group to develop proposals for a National Cancer Biobank, under the auspices of the Consortium. The Expert Group was asked to make recommendations around terms of reference which include service delivery models, appropriate funding mechanisms, information and communication technology issues, and ethical concerns, such as patient consent and confidentiality. The Expert Group is also addressing the links that may be developed between the National Cancer Biobank and the proposed cancer biobank in Northern Ireland, with the potential of ultimately developing an all-island resource.

Upon Minister Harney's request, the Director of NCI asked the respective Directors of the NCI's Office of International Affairs (OIA) and Office of Biorepositories and Biospecimens to serve as NCI delegates to this Expert Group. The first meeting convened on 26 July 2007.

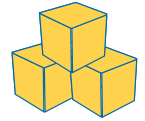
Throughout the remainder of the year, the group met five times and made additional contributions to various meetings through invited experts.

■ NATIONAL CANCER BIOBANKING WORKSHOPS AND MINI-SYMPOSIUM



Expert Group participants examine data.

On 10-11 December 2007, the NCI delegation traveled to Dublin, Ireland to meet with the Expert Group. The delegates attended a workshop held at the HRB offices, as well as a mini-symposium at St. James's Hospital. These events united national and international experts to present and discuss relevant biobanking topics and develop recommendations for a range of logistic, operational, and scientific issues associated with implementing the National Cancer Biobank. Recommendations from previous Expert Group meetings informed all workshop and mini-symposium discussions. During the mini-symposium, the Expert Group had the opportunity to tour the facilities at Beaumont Hospital and the Prostate Cancer Biobank storage facility and laboratories at St. James's Hospital. Later, participants examined and discussed biobanking from an Irish perspective, the Biobanking and Biomolecular Resources Research Infrastructure, and the Prostate Cancer



Biobank. The group also reviewed a case study on the Wales Cancer Bank in relation to biobanking informatics.

After an extensive national stakeholder consultation process on the first draft of the Expert Group report, the group will submit a final report to the Minister of the DoHC of Ireland in 2008. This report will include recommendations for the proposed National Cancer Biobank and will address the terms of reference. Development of an implementation strategy, including budget and timeline, will be forthcoming.

HEALTH ECONOMICS

Health economics research and cancer policy analysis are critical to improving the equitable distribution of quality cancer care on the island of Ireland. In 2007, the Consortium sponsored or was involved with several important health economic events and programs: the All-Ireland Health Economics Workshop, the Northern Ireland Health Economics Workshop at QUB, and the HRB/NCI Health Economics Fellowships in Cancer Program. These initiatives will assist in fulfilling the need for training in the area of cancer health economic and policy analysis on the island of Ireland.

■ THE ALL-IRELAND HEALTH ECONOMICS WORKSHOP

The NCI organized a Consortium-sponsored All-Ireland Health

Economics Workshop in 2007 to foster the sharing of health economics and policy research information between Consortium participants and NCI staff and grantees. The meeting promoted productive dialogue among more than twenty delegates from Ireland and Northern Ireland and staff and grantees of the NCI on the similarities and differences between the national settings with regard to policy questions, organization of healthcare services, and data sources.



Attendees at the May 2007 All-Ireland Health Economics Workshop.

On the first day of the workshop, participants discussed how cancer-related health economics and health services research data are used to inform cancer control policymakers. Participants also explored how this data is used to help researchers obtain descriptive estimates of cancer-related economics parameters and patterns of care. The second day featured demonstrations on how these estimates are then used within the context of policy-oriented models. An evening reception was held at the Embassy of Ireland.

■ NORTHERN IRELAND HEALTH ECONOMICS WORKSHOP

On 6 November 2007, QUB hosted the Northern Ireland Health Economics Workshop. This international seminar addressed health policy and health system decision-making, with NCI grantees in attendance as presenters. Participants addressed policy and health economic modeling in relation to a broad spectrum of chronic diseases, including cancer and heart disease. They also discussed methods for sharing knowledge and building partnerships. The program and presentations from the Northern Ireland Health Economics Workshop are available on the Consortium Web site at http://www.allirelandnci.org/programs/health_economics/ni_he_wkshp.shtml.

■ HRB/NCI HEALTH ECONOMICS FELLOWSHIPS IN CANCER PROGRAM

During 2007, the HRB and the NCI laid the groundwork for launching the HRB/NCI Health Economics Fellowships in Cancer Program as a pilot program for 2008. This program aims to encourage applicants to pursue careers in health economics on the island of Ireland and culminates in a PhD in health economics. This four-year doctoral development program will be administered through the HRB PhD Scholars Programme in Health Services Research.