

NCRI SEES RECORD INVESTMENT IN CANCER RESEARCH

The National Cancer Research Institute (NCRI) partners funded £393m worth of research into cancer in 2006, an increase of £135m compared to 2002. But it will warn of slower progress in spend for some cancers, it is announced at the NCRI Cancer Conference in Birmingham today (Sunday).

An analysis of cancer research spend by the NCRI – a collaboration of government and charity partners – reveals that between 2002 and 2006, its 20 member organisations spent a total of £1.6 billion on cancer research in the UK.

During this period, the NCRI witnessed an increase in spend from its members on most types of cancer, and a doubling of investment in cancer prevention work. But its analysis also revealed that some cancers fared better than others. Of particular concern were lung, pancreatic and oesophageal cancers, which remain difficult to treat and research. This is largely due to the fact that symptoms often present late – resulting in the cancer being at a more advanced stage at diagnosis and the difficulties associated with where the tumour is located in the body.

Dr Jane Cope, director of NCRI explains: “These figures show the extent to which investment in research is mirrored by increasing survival rates – which is great news. But it’s of concern that we’re not seeing the same improvements for some of the harder to treat cancers.

“There is a ‘snowball effect’ at work here – the more a cancer is researched, the more avenues are opened for further work. Well understood cancers like breast and leukaemia have a “critical mass” of research behind them that has been built over many years and which leads to more research and promising findings.

“The NCRI is committed to developing ways to drive forward research activity in the more challenging areas and has already found some solutions but clearly there is still more to do.”

Although nearly four per cent of research funding targeted to a specific tumour site was directed towards lung cancer in 2006, the disease accounts for 22 per cent of cancer deaths. NCRI established a group to examine the reasons why lung has received less attention than other cancers, relative to incidence and mortality. A number of priority areas for action were identified and are being pursued, including £2.25m allocated to supportive and palliative care research in lung cancer.

Since its inception in 2002, the NCRI has collected information on all the cancer research funded by its member organisations. This enables them to analyse and understand the overall investment in cancer research at a national level, with the aim of reducing gaps in the portfolio and responding to opportunities.

One of the biggest increases in investment has been in prevention research, which leapt from £6m to £14m in the five years since the NCRI’s inception. Prevention research now makes up almost four per cent of the NCRI’s total funding portfolio – up from two per cent in 2002. This investment has in part been administered through the

National Prevention Research Initiative (NPRI), established in 2004 by the NCRI in to drive forward work in this area. In 2008, an additional £12m was awarded for a third call for proposals to advance research in this field and this will ensure that the increased trend in investment will continue.

Professor Sir Ken Calman, chair of the NCRI, said: “This important analysis allows us to see where we’ve done well and address those areas where investment is still lacking. The increase in overall spend is encouraging but we must not be complacent – the variations in relative spend on the different disease sites are clearly concerning and we will work towards ensuring that all cancers receive the focus and attention that they deserve, so that more people can survive the disease.”

For media enquiries please contact Josie Gray on 07918 608 599 or the London press office on 020 7061 8300, or out-of-hours, the duty press officer on 07050 264 059.

Notes to editors

Analysis of the national cancer research portfolio 2002-2006, by the National Cancer Research Institute. Copies are available from the press office on request.

About the NCRI Cancer Conference

The National Cancer Research Institute (NCRI) Cancer Conference is the UK’s premier forum for disseminating advances across all aspects of cancer research.

About the NCRI

The National Cancer Research Institute (NCRI) was established in April 2001. It is a UK-wide partnership between the government, charity and industry which promotes co-operation in cancer research among the 21 member organisations for the benefit of patients, the public and the scientific community. www.ncri.org.uk

NCRI members are: the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry (ABPI); Association for International Cancer Research; Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council; Breakthrough Breast Cancer; Breast Cancer Campaign; Cancer Research UK; CHILDREN with LEUKAEMIA, Department of Health; Economic and Social Research Council; Leukaemia Research; Ludwig Institute for Cancer Research; Macmillan Cancer Support; Marie Curie Cancer Care; Medical Research Council; Northern Ireland Health and Social Care (Research & Development Office); Roy Castle Lung Cancer Foundation; Scottish Government Health Directorates (Chief Scientist Office); Tenovus; Welsh Assembly Government (Wales Office of Research and Development for Health & Social Care); The Wellcome Trust; and Yorkshire Cancer Research.