

## **PRESS RELEASE**

**Tuesday 05 November 2013**

### **NEW COMPUTER PROGRAM TO HELP GPs KNOW WHEN TO SEND PATIENTS FOR CANCER TESTS**

NEW software that estimates the likelihood someone has cancer based on their symptoms could help GPs decide which patients to send for further tests, according to a study\* announced at the National Cancer Research Institute (NCRI) Cancer Conference today (Tuesday).

Known as 'electronic Cancer Decision Support' (eCDS)\*\*, the program works out the risk that someone with a particular symptom or symptoms could have cancer, based on information logged by GPs during a patient visit.

It also compares these symptoms against other factors, such as whether the person smokes or is an ex-smoker and alerts GPs when the patient is at risk from cancer. It is designed to work in the background of the computer system where doctors log notes.

The work was led by Macmillan Cancer Support with part-funding from the Department of Health.

As well as knowing what risk a single symptom, such as a persistent cough, might carry; the computer program also automatically alerts GPs when it recognises a combination of symptoms that mean the patient should be tested for cancer.

By using this information to estimate a person's cancer risk, the program aims to give GPs guidance about how serious a symptom, or combination of symptoms might be. And helps them decide which patients they should refer for further investigation.

Crucially, alerting GPs to cancer risk as soon as a patient tells them about a symptom, could lead to earlier diagnoses of cancer– which significantly improves people's chances of beating the disease.

The programme can estimate cancer risk for oesophago-gastric, lung, colorectal, pancreatic and ovarian cancer.

Professor Willie Hamilton, a GP researcher based at the University of Exeter, and one of the researchers upon whose work the tool is based, said: "We hope that this new computer program will prove useful and effective in helping GPs make decisions about when to send their patients for further tests based on cancer risks.

"Despite the fact that more than one in three of us will be diagnosed with cancer in our lifetime, cancer cases are still relatively unusual occurrences for GPs to encounter during their day to day practice. We've designed a system that doesn't replace their knowledge or training, but could be used alongside their notes to give extra information. And what's really useful is if, for example, a patient comes to see me with one symptom such as nausea or sickness. Then three weeks later they come back and say they've had trouble swallowing, the computer will automatically ping up with an alert to say their

NCRI Cancer Conference  
Press Office

Angel Building  
407 St John Street  
London EC1V 4AD

T: +44 (0)20 3469 8300

T: +44 (0)7050 264 059

(out of hours)

E: [press@ncri.org.uk](mailto:press@ncri.org.uk)

[conference.ncri.org.uk](http://conference.ncri.org.uk)

risk of oesophageal cancer is over seven per cent which will alert me to refer the patient for tests.”

Dr Rosie Loftus, lead GP adviser at Macmillan Cancer Support, said: “GPs have a vital role to play in ensuring that cancer is diagnosed at an early stage to give people the best possible chance of survival. When you’ve only got around ten minutes with each patient, it’s vital that you ask the right questions and are able to quickly calculate someone’s risk in order to facilitate an early referral. Macmillan hopes that this tool will support GPs to identify the symptoms of cancer and help to improve cancer survival rates.”

While the software is still in the testing phase of the trial the researchers hope that, if successful, it could be made available to all GPs.

Dr Harpal Kumar, chief executive of Cancer Research UK and chair of the NCRI, said: “Diagnosing cancer early is crucial to surviving this devastating disease. GPs are on the frontline when it comes to assessing possible cancer cases so it’s essential that they have all the information they need to make effective referrals.”

The workshop will also cover the theoretical and technology aspects of clinical decision support systems.

---

#### ENDS

For Media Enquiries please contact  
Flora Malein on +44 (0)20 3469 8051 or, out of hours,  
the duty press officer on +44 (0)7050 264 059  
Claire Keuls, Macmillan Cancer Support, on 0207 840 4872 or  
ckeuls@macmillan.org.uk

---

#### Notes to editors

\*Clinical decision support systems workshop, hosted by Willie Hamilton with presentations from Jeremy Wyatt and Tom Fahey. View the Conference abstract here <http://conference.ncri.org.uk/abstracts/2013/abstracts/Symp14.html>

\*\* eCDS is based on Professor Willie Hamilton’s Risk Assessment Tool (RAT) and Professor Julia Hipsley-Cox’s Qcancer software.

#### About Macmillan Cancer Support

More than one in three of us will get cancer. For most of us it will be the toughest fight we ever face. And the feelings of isolation and loneliness that so many people experience make it even harder.

But you don’t have to go through it alone. The Macmillan team is with you every step of the way.

We are the nurses and therapists helping you through treatment. The experts on the end of the phone. The advisers telling you which benefits you’re entitled to. The volunteers giving you a hand with the everyday things. The campaigners improving cancer care. The community there for you online, any time. The supporters who make it all possible.

Together, we are all Macmillan Cancer Support

#### About the NCRI Cancer Conference

The National Cancer Research Institute (NCRI) Cancer Conference is the UK’s major forum for showcasing the best British and international cancer research.

NCRI Cancer Conference  
Press Office

Angel Building  
407 St John Street  
London EC1V 4AD

T: +44 (0)20 3469 8300

T: +44 (0)7050 264 059

(out of hours)

E: [press@ncri.org.uk](mailto:press@ncri.org.uk)

[conference.ncri.org.uk](http://conference.ncri.org.uk)

The Conference offers unique opportunities for networking and sharing knowledge by bringing together world-leading experts from all cancer research disciplines. The ninth annual NCRI Cancer Conference is taking place from 3–6 November 2013 at the BT Convention Centre in Liverpool. Roche is the principal sponsor of the 2013 NCRI Cancer Conference.

For more information visit [conference.ncri.org.uk](http://conference.ncri.org.uk)

#### About the NCRI

The National Cancer Research Institute (NCRI) was established in 2001. It is a UK-wide partnership between the government, charity and industry which promotes cooperation in cancer research.

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 Cancer UK; Department of Health; Economic and Social Research Council; Leukaemia & Lymphoma 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); Prostate Cancer UK; Roy Castle Lung Cancer Foundation; Scottish Government Health Directorates (Chief Scientist Office); Tenovus; Welsh Government (National Institute for Social Care and Health Research); The Wellcome Trust; and Yorkshire Cancer Research.

For more information visit [www.ncri.org.uk](http://www.ncri.org.uk)

NCRI Cancer Conference  
Press Office

Angel Building  
407 St John Street  
London EC1V 4AD

T: +44 (0)20 3469 8300

T: +44 (0)7050 264 059

(out of hours)

E: [press@ncri.org.uk](mailto:press@ncri.org.uk)

[conference.ncri.org.uk](http://conference.ncri.org.uk)