

New Developments

M Phil fellowships

Not everyone who wishes to undertake full time research is either equipped or able to apply for a 3 year fellowship. We are therefore introducing an additional scheme in which we will offer support for one or two years full-time research (pro-rata for part time) to work for an MPhil degree. The conditions will be comparable to those for our fellowship programme and we expect to advertise this in autumn 2003.

R Research Sabbatical Training Scheme

Established researchers can derive great benefit from visiting and undertaking research in the best research centres in their field, which might lie outside Northern Ireland. The benefits include learning new techniques, interacting with leading researchers, professional refreshment and the development of new research collaborations. The universities provide opportunities for their staff to undertake sabbaticals. In contrast the HPSS does not have provision for this type of sabbatical and financial support for such visits is difficult to obtain. The R&D Office, as part of its commitment to increase the ability of researchers to conduct the highest quality R&D, will be offering support for senior researchers to undertake sabbatical visits to leading research centres. These schemes will be available to those who hold a career post within the HPSS, including joint appointments, independent contractors or

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voluntary not for profit organisations in Northern Ireland involved in health & social care provision, and

who have substantial post-doctoral research experience of at least 3 years. We would normally expect the researchers to be associated with one of the RRGs. Support will be provided for up to 1 year, including the applicant's basic salary costs and a contribution towards other costs. For holders of joint appointments salary support will refer to the HPSS component of the post and the other contributions will be *pro-rata* of approved costs. As opportunities will arise occasionally there will be no closing date and applications will be accepted throughout the year. The details of the scheme are available on the R&D Office website.

Remember all R&D Schemes are advertised in the Belfast Telegraph and on our website, www.csa.n-i.nhs.uk/rdo

R RG New Call

There are seven RRGs at different stages of development. They all consist of the programmes of research which were supported when the RRGs were established. Science is continually moving and new researchers are coming into Northern Ireland. We have therefore decided to offer additional programmes of research to add to the RRGs. We will be funding up to 14 new programmes of research (based on the quality of the proposals), one to be assigned to each RRG and the other seven to be distributed according to the quality of the applications. The closing date for applications was Friday 30 May 2003. Applications are invited for new programmes of research and from researchers who are not currently receiving support in the RRG programme. As it has been estimated that 70% of current RRG support goes to basic laboratory science we are inviting proposals in the fields of clinical and health & social care services research.

BioBank

Last year we held detailed discussions regarding the formation of an all-Ireland spoke for UK BioBank. Our conclusion was that it would be more beneficial for us to retain a degree of independence by developing an All-Ireland BioBank and then to seek to be associated with UK BioBank. In this way our data could be pooled with theirs but also used for our own research needs. The Health Research Board and the R&D Office have jointly commissioned Professor Berna Herity, recently retired Professor of Epidemiology at University College Dublin, to produce a protocol. When the protocol is developed an application will be made to the Wellcome Trust for funding. The Wellcome Trust have already indicated that their support for UK BioBank does not preclude support for other similar proposals. UK BioBank now has its own website www.ukbiobank.ac.uk

Northern Ireland Longitudinal Study

Since 1971 the National Office for Statistics has been undertaking a longitudinal study in England. This takes routinely collected data from the census and the Registrar Generals reports and uses these to produce longitudinal data on health & wellbeing. This is used for policy development and is also available to the research community. It is important that similar information should be available for Northern Ireland and the R&D Office has agreed to contribute towards the costs of establishing a Northern Ireland Longitudinal Study. This will commence with the 2001 census but if funds become available the 1991 census data and other health & social care information can be added to it. The project will be run by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA).

All Island Co-operative Group for Cancer Clinical Trials



Ireland-Northern Ireland-National Cancer Institute
Cancer Consortium

Dr Andrew von Eschenbach, Director of the US National Cancer Institute, launched the first all-island cancer network on 8th February 2003. The network will ensure that patients in Ireland will have access to the latest and most effective cancer therapies. The network consists of the Irish Oncology Research Group (ICORG) based in Dublin and the Clinical Research Support Centre (CRSC) located in Belfast, nine Cancer Centres in Ireland and one in Northern Ireland.

Speaking at the launch in the Royal College of Surgeons in Dublin, Dr von Eschenbach welcomed the formation of the network. He said that such networks – known as cancer cooperative groups – had played a pivotal role in the United States in delivering new forms of treatment for cancer. He was pleased that a similar network was being formed on the island of Ireland. He 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 cooperative

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group. The All-island Cancer network or cooperative group has been formed under the aegis of the Ireland/

Northern Ireland/ United States Cancer Consortium agreed between the three governments in 1999 following the signing of the Belfast Agreement. The Consortium supports initiatives to improve cancer care, research and training on an all-island basis. Dr von Eschenbach, a member of the Board of the Consortium, was joined at the launch by the two other Board members, Dr Jim Kiely, Chief Medical Officer of the Department of Health and Children in Ireland and Dr Henrietta Campbell, Chief Medical Officer of the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety in Northern Ireland.

The new cooperative group will be jointly funded by the HRB in Dublin and the R&D Office in Belfast. The group will receive £700,000 over the next two years to carry out its work. Its principal role will be to initiate and coordinate clinical trials in cancer hospitals in both parts of the island. Nine hospitals in Ireland have been funded under a Consortium initiative over the past two years so that they can offer patients the opportunity to participate in high quality clinical trials. In Northern Ireland, the R&D Office funds the Northern Ireland Cancer Clinical Trials Centre which supports clinical trials in the cancer centre and four cancer units.

Clinical trials are an essential part of developing better cancer preventive and therapeutic strategies and

are generally acknowledged worldwide as the optimal way to advance cancer care at the bedside. Clinical trials also play the added role of ensuring uniformity of practice and have led to changes in practice. As clinical trials become the global standard

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for effective cancer prevention and care, it is of paramount importance that the island of Ireland enter the mainstream of cancer clinical care by enhancing its abilities to conduct cancer clinical trials, and thus improve patients' access to new therapies. Participation in clinical trials leads to higher standards of clinical care.

Because of the relatively small population on the island (approximately 5.4 million people in Ireland and Northern Ireland combined), it is essential that the two jurisdictions collaborate with one another and with the United States and other countries to create a pool of participants large enough to complete trials in a timely fashion. 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.

A list of all Research & Development programmes funded by the R&D Office is available on our website at www.csa.n-i.nhs.uk/rdo