University Receives £300,000 to investigate links between viruses and cancer

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Researchers at the University of Birmingham are to receive more than £300,000 to investigate the roles viral infections play in causing cancers to develop. The INCA project, which is supported by 12.6 million Euros in funding from the European Commission brings together cancer scientists from 13 European countries.

The research teams will focus work on the part five common viruses and one bacterium, play in the development of a number of common cancers. The viruses: Hepatitis C, Herpes, Human T Cell leukaemia virus, Human papillomavirus and the Epstein Barr virus are known to play a role in around 17% of cancer cases. In addition, the bacterium Helicobacter pylori is the infectious agent responsible for the second highest number of infection-associated cancers.

The aim of the research is to try to understand, why these viruses, which often remain in the bodies of healthy individuals for many years, can cause cells to become cancerous. The research teams will also be looking at what factors may trigger these changes to potentially develop new treatments or screening programmes.

The Birmingham team from the University's Institute for Cancer Studies will be examining the role the Epstein Barr virus plays in the development of Hodgkin's lymphoma and nasopharyngeal carcinoma (cancer of the upper respiratory system).

The EBV is related to herpes and is one of the most common human viruses. The virus occurs worldwide, and most people become infected with EBV sometime during their lives. The Birmingham team will be looking to explain, why, in a small number of cases the virus plays a role in the development of cancerous cells.

Professor Lawrence Young the Director of the CRUK Institute for Cancer Studies said: "Our previous work has helped to show the links that exist between the Epstein Barr Virus and several types of cancer. However, bringing together researchers from across Europe, means that the INCA project will be a very wide ranging investigation into the links between viruses and cancers. Although viral infections are known to play a role in the development of stomach cancers, cervical cancer and cancer of the lymphatic system the biological mechanisms and trigger factors are an area which will benefit hugely from further research hopefully leading to better therapeutic and preventative approaches."

The list of the participating research groups and enterprises, project summaries and open positions are available on a dedicated public website at **www.inca-project.org (http://www.inca-project.org/)**

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