

Cancer Research UK launches first super cancer centre in Birmingham

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Birmingham will today become the first link in a unique chain of Cancer Research UK Centres to be launched round the country.

These cancer centres will draw together world class research and areas of medical expertise to achieve the best possible results for cancer patients nationwide.

As the first Cancer Research UK Centre, Birmingham will set the pace for national and international progress for genetics, gene therapy and the link between viruses and some cancers as well as focusing on cancers of the prostate and bladder and leukaemia. It will also become a leading centre for clinical trials.

Collaboration is the key to the success of the Centre which will also concentrate on large-scale population studies, cell biology and tumour immunology.

Cancer Research UK already supports research in Birmingham but is set to increase its contribution to around £9m a year to help develop the Centre.

Professor Lawrence Young, head of the University of Birmingham's College of Medical and Dental Sciences, said: "Making a real difference to cancer patients is what we are all about. The new Cancer Research UK Centre in Birmingham will help us to fast track new laboratory discoveries into the clinic.

"We are at the forefront of a cancer revolution – translating our research into new treatments. We have created a unique blend of doctors, scientists and nurses - all working together to ensure that laboratory discoveries are rapidly developed into treatments that will improve the lives and extend the survival of patients in the West Midlands."

In partnership with the University of Birmingham, the Centre also aims to attract and train the highest quality clinical and non-clinical cancer research students, to develop infrastructure for tissue banking and data collection across the West Midlands, to strengthen collaboration between scientists and clinicians and to improve international communication.

Professor Paul Moss, who is head of the University of Birmingham's Cancer Research UK Institute of Studies and head of cancer sciences, said: "This is an extremely exciting period in cancer research where years of investment in understanding the basic mechanisms responsible for the development of cancer are being translated into new therapies, better diagnosis and improved survival.

"The Cancer Research UK Centre in Birmingham is at the forefront of these developments and has created a unique environment for advancing our understanding of cancer and applying this knowledge to the benefit of patients."

Alan Johnson, a 61 year old retired architect, was diagnosed with bladder cancer six years ago and believes he was very lucky to go on a trial in Birmingham. "When someone says you've got cancer it frightens the living daylights out of you. It is a terrifying thing but people just don't realise it's no longer the death sentence it was years ago.

"I was very lucky to go on a trial with chemotherapy and radiotherapy. It wasn't a lot of fun at the time but here I am six years on enjoying life, playing a lot of golf and enjoying travelling to Spain. There are a lot of people out there doing amazing things as a result of all the cancer research going on.

"I feel so fortunate to have been treated in Birmingham," said Mr Johnson, from Leek Wootton near Warwick. "When I look at all that clinical expertise and realise that it's all there for people like me I am very thankful."

Alan Rooke, a 72-year-old retired civil engineer from Henley-in-Arden, is being treated for Acute Myeloid Leukaemia at the University Hospital Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust.

He said: "My own treatment has been very successful and I am still enjoying my retirement because of it. This investment by Cancer Research UK will make Birmingham an even better cancer centre – and that is great news for patients.

"It's fantastic news that Birmingham is to be the first new Cancer Research UK Centre. Birmingham is already an excellent centre for cancer patients because of its involvement in research and its highly trained clinicians."

Harpal Kumar, chief executive of Cancer Research UK, said: "Funding these centres of excellence is one of the charity's priorities and will enable us to work towards the goals we have set to improve the treatment and survival of cancer patients. But we continue to welcome the generous donations we receive from the public to ensure we can continue to build on what we have started today."

Cancer Research UK plans to launch more centres around the UK during 2009.

Ends

For media enquiries please call the Cancer Research UK press office on 020 7061 8300, or the out of hours' duty press officer on 07050 264059.

Notes to Editor

There are around 7,300 cases of leukaemia diagnosed in the UK each year. Around 4,300 people die each year from the disease. Around 220 cases of leukaemia are diagnosed in the Birmingham area each year. Around 10,300 people are diagnosed with bladder cancer each year in the UK and about 4,800 people die from the disease each year.

Cancer Research UK Centres aim to establish a nationwide network of excellence that will provide the best possible outcomes for patients by linking research activity with patient care and public engagement. Each Centre will focus on specific areas of research and aim to raise standards of care and forge links with local communities.