

Cancer Research UK launch national Children's Cancer Trials Team in Birmingham

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Birmingham will be at the forefront of developments in childhood cancer research thanks to the launch of a new centre which will co-ordinate groundbreaking clinical trials across the UK.

The Cancer Research UK Children's Clinical Trials Team at the University of Birmingham will play a major role in the development of new treatments for childhood cancers.

Clinical trials are essential to develop new treatments for cancer by testing the latest drugs and discovering the best ways to use both new and existing treatments. Currently around 60 per cent of children with cancer are on a trial in the UK and this high level of participation in clinical research has had a major impact on the development of successful treatment strategies used today.

A combination of research and clinical trials has made a huge difference in the number of children surviving cancer. Today, three quarters of children are successfully treated, compared with just a quarter in the 1960s.

From its launch the team will be co-ordinating 10 open trials and they aim to open at least two more new trials this year. The trials take place in 21 children's cancer treatment centres across the UK and Ireland*.

Dr Pam Kearns, Senior Lecturer at the University of Birmingham and paediatric oncologist at Birmingham Children's Hospital who will lead the new team, said: "We're delighted that our team can start work on delivering a series of clinical trials which will hopefully bring real benefits to many children with cancer across the UK. While we have made great progress increasing the number of children who survive childhood cancer it's through trials of new treatments that we can help even more children beat the disease."

Each year around 1,500 children are diagnosed with the cancer and leukaemia in the UK and it claims around 300 lives.

The trials coordinated by the team will increase each year as new trials are designed and receive funding.

Several trials of new drugs to tackle paediatric cancer are in the pipeline. These include 'FOREST', a Cancer Research UK funded Phase I trial exploring the use of a new antibody to treat solid tumours in children under 12 whose cancer has returned or can't be treated by conventional approaches.

Each year Cancer Research UK will invest over £700,000 for the core running of the team and will provide extra funding for individual trials. The team will sit within the existing Cancer Research UK Clinical Trials Unit at the University of Birmingham, allowing them to draw on the world-class expertise at the centre.

Professor Philip Johnson, director of the Cancer Research UK Clinical Trials Unit at the University of Birmingham, said: "At the University of Birmingham, we have a strong track record in the design and implementation of clinical trials. This new team will galvanise our offering by enabling us to reach cancer sufferers of all ages, rapidly take cutting edge science from the laboratory to the bedside. We also want to use our expertise to design trials for rarer cancers where it can be harder to recruit enough participants, using innovative trial design and joining international trials."

Kate Law, director of clinical research at Cancer Research UK, said: "Cancer Research UK is the largest single funder of children's cancer research and trials in the country and the launch of this new team demonstrates our total commitment to ensuring more children survive cancer with the fewest possible side effects."

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