

## Unique mobile medical research facility launched

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The first mobile medical research facility in the UK is launched today. The pioneering **Health Research Bus (HRB)** (<http://www.crf.bham.ac.uk/facilities/mobile.shtml>), developed by the University of Birmingham, is set to transform the way that clinical research for major health issues like diabetes, obesity and ageing is carried out in the community. The bus, which is funded by Birmingham Science City via Advantage West Midlands, will be officially launched by Professor Dame Sally Davies the UK's Chief Medical Officer at 11.30am in Chancellor's Court, University of Birmingham.

The bus boasts state-of-the-art scanning equipment and consultation rooms, which will enable scientists from the University to carry out a wide variety of clinical studies, scanning programmes and health promotion activities anywhere in the region. Birmingham researchers will work in collaboration with regional healthcare providers, particularly University Hospitals Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust and Birmingham Children's NHS Trust, to drive research and intervention programmes delivering tangible health benefits for Birmingham and beyond.

As well as a reception area, the bus includes a procedure room where work such as biopsies can be carried out or blood samples taken. It is also equipped with a dedicated £100,000 DXA scanner, which is used for measuring body composition and bone density; resuscitation equipment; IT facilities for data input and space for temporary sample storage.

**Professor Paul Stewart** (<http://medweb4.bham.ac.uk/ssp/Printable.aspx?id=253>), Director of Research and Knowledge Transfer for the University of Birmingham's College of Medical and Dental Sciences, said, 'The bus will be taken directly into the community, to GP surgeries, supermarkets and schools, making access to the HRB high-tech facilities readily available to the community.'

'This bus is a unique opportunity for researchers to overcome a number of barriers to clinical research. In particular it can reach large parts of the population which have previously been difficult to engage, notably young children and the elderly, as they find the experience of coming to take part in research intimidating or have difficulty travelling.'

'Doctors can be out in the community, conducting simple, but essential clinical trials through investigations, observations or just interviews. By bringing research into communities, the Birmingham Science City Health Research Bus will also help raise awareness of the major health issues facing the UK.'

A major initial focus for the bus will be used in tackling one such health issue - obesity. This is a particularly urgent issue for the West Midlands, as it has highest incidence of obesity in the country. According to Government figures, 28 per cent of men and 29 per cent of women in the region are obese, while a further 48 per cent and 33 per cent respectively are overweight - leaving only around a third of the regional population "normal" weight. Such statistics mean that the population here runs a higher risk of contracting diabetes, heart disease and cancer.

But perhaps more worrying is the fact that one-third of children in the West Midlands are either overweight or obese - and some of these youngsters already have diabetes, hypertension, fatty livers, depression and early markers for future heart disease. The availability of the bus for studies seeking to tackle regional obesity, particularly amongst children, will hopefully make a huge impact on addressing, and in time reversing, this trend.



Health Research Bus on campus