

'Health Bus' begins first clinical research studies

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The first clinical studies to take place on a pioneering mobile medical research facility developed by the University of Birmingham were beginning today (Thursday March 10).

The Health Research Bus (HRB) was launched last June as the first facility of its kind in the UK. Funded by Birmingham Science City and the Queen Elizabeth Hospital Birmingham Charity as part of its Research Grants programme, and led jointly by the Universities of Birmingham and Warwick, the Bus operates in collaboration with regional healthcare providers including University Hospitals Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust and Birmingham Children's NHS Trust. It aims to revolutionise how clinical research for major health issues like diabetes, obesity and ageing is carried out in the community.

Today sees the Bus arrive in the colourful markets area of the city centre on the first of four dates during the next fortnight when members of the public will be invited to take part in research studies organised by the Wellcome Trust Clinical Research Facility at Birmingham's Queen Elizabeth Hospital.

The first is to collect DNA samples to be used as a healthy comparison against a bank of samples for patients suffering from a disease called vasculitis (inflammation of the blood vessels).

'We want to find out if there are certain genetic traits that the patients display so we need a wide range of samples from non-disease sufferers to compare them with', explains Dr Julie Williams.

The second study is to recruit healthy volunteers and measure their immune response to a benign virus in their system. This will help in the treatment of patients with lupus (an autoimmune disease) in whom there is thought to be an increased reactivity. Patient samples have already been obtained and this study now needs healthy volunteers for comparison.

The third study will be looking at levels of fatigue in patients with vasculitis as this has a huge impact on their quality of life. 'Again, we are looking for healthy volunteers to compare with our patient cohorts.'

Participants and other members of the public will be able to step inside the state-of-the-art Bus which houses procedure and treatment rooms and IT facilities as well as a £100,000 DXA scanner, used for measuring body composition and bone density.

'The "bus" is the first of its kind in the UK and will enable clinical researchers in Birmingham to access a large population of diverse ethnic and socio-economic mix in the surrounding community' says Professor Paul Stewart, Dean of Medicine at the University of Birmingham and Director of the Wellcome Trust Clinical Research Facility.

'In doing so, it will widen participation in clinical trials across all sectors of society through a start-of-the-art facility linked back to our hospital base at the University Hospital Birmingham NHS Trust. The bus will be a crucial way of rapidly conducting trials and ensuring their results are implemented quickly to improve the health of patients in Birmingham and beyond.'

The studies will take place on March 10, 11, 17 and 18.

For more information, please contact Jenni Ameghino, University of Birmingham Press Office. Tel: 0121 415 8134.

Notes to editors

- The Health Research Bus is funded by Birmingham Science City which is part-funded by Advantage West Midlands. It is part of the translational medicine strand of the Science City Research Alliance between the University of Birmingham and the University of Warwick. Other partners are the Wellcome Trust, the Wolfson Foundation, the Medical Research Council and the NHS.

- Birmingham Science City is a region-wide partnership of public sector, business and research organisations, which develops and uses science and technology to improve the quality of life and prosperity in the West Midlands and the UK.

www.birminghamsciencecity.co.uk (<http://www.birminghamsciencecity.co.uk>)

- The Bus' is partly funded by the Queen Elizabeth Hospital Birmingham Charity as part of its Research Grants programme. The charity exists to support the patients and staff of UHB by funding research, equipment and facilities over and above core NHS funding.

- The University of Birmingham is a truly vibrant, global community and an internationally-renowned institution. Its work brings people from across the world to Birmingham, including researchers and teachers and more than four thousand international students from nearly 150 different countries. The University is home to approximately 28,000 students. With more than 7,500 postgraduate students from across the world, Birmingham is one of the most popular universities for postgraduate study in the UK. The University is the eighth largest employer in the Birmingham/Solihull sub-region and plays an integral role in the economic, social and cultural growth of local and regional communities; working closely with businesses and organisations, employing approximately 6,000 staff and providing 10,000 graduates annually. The University contributes £662 million to the City of Birmingham and £779 million to the West Midlands region, with an annual income of more than £462 million.

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