University's TV 'sperm race' helps to unlock mysteries of procreation

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University of Birmingham reproductive medicine expert **Dr Jackson Kirkman-Brown** invites a group of male students to take part in an experimental 'Sperm Race' to explore what it takes to be the best out of millions in the BBC3 documentary *How Sex Works* tonight.

Five obliging young men aged 19-25 rise to the challenge, providing samples which are 'raced' through an appropriate clinical medium at Dr Kirkman-Brown's state-of-the-art laboratories. After a nerve-wracking wait, the results are analysed over a friendly pint in the campus bar to show whose sperm has the best motility (swimming ability), whose is fastest and whose deposit contains the most!

The unusual experiment helps to illustrate the epic struggle that faces a solitary sperm that reaches the 'finishing line' in the third and final episode of the documentary, part of the *Sex Season* being featured on BBC3. *The UoB research team were selected as international leaders in understanding how a human sperm is selected and swims through the female tract.*

The series has explored the processes that culminate in procreation, the ultimate function of sex, observing what happens during key stages of sex from the physiological, neurological and psychological perspectives.

Dr Kirkman-Brown comments: '

Human sperm swim the equivalent distance of climbing Mount Everest through the female tract to reach the egg. The inability of an individual sperm to swim and find the egg is probably the largest, but least well-defined cause of fertility problems for the 20% of couples needing help to conceive. In the programme we demonstrate that it is this swimming ability as opposed to sperm count that matters. Through experiments like those in the program UoB research focuses on how to improve how sperm swim to help people conceive, but also to stop it as a novel contraceptive.

For more information, please contact Jenni Ameghino, University of Birmingham Press Office, 0121 415 8134. Mobile: 07768 924156.

- **How Sex Works, Monday January 23, 9pm-10pm BBC Three.**

Then available on BBC iPlayer and shown again on:

- **Tue 24 Jan 2012, 00:30 BBC Three**
- **Wed 25 Jan 2012, 04:00 BBC Three**
- **Fri 27 Jan 2012, 03:30 BBC Three**

The documentary will also be shown on the National Geographic Channel on a later occasion.

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