

# Cancer Research UK

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**O**n February 4th 2002, two major British cancer charities, the Cancer Research Campaign (CRC) and Imperial Cancer Research Fund (ICRF) merged to form Cancer Research UK. After the National Cancer Institute (NCI) in the US, this is now the world's second largest cancer research organization. In contrast to the NCI, whose \$3.5 billion annual budget is predominantly government-funded, Cancer Research UK emphasizes its independence as an organization that draws nearly all its funding from public support. With the merger, Cancer Research UK hopes to decrease its administrative costs, avoid competition from public donations and strengthen its ability to attract funding from existing and new sources. The ambitious aim is to increase the current annual budget of around £130 million to £200 million over the next 5 years.

This increased budget is needed to support Cancer Research UK's plans to build or expand four research institutes with a multidisciplinary approach to the understanding and treatment of cancer. A new £11 million Northern Institute for Cancer Research with a focus on drug discovery is planned in Newcastle, in partnership with the government, Newcastle University and the Foundation for Children with Leukaemia. In Oxford, through a collaboration with Oxford University and the British Heart Foundation, a new £15 million prevention centre will place priority on cancer prevention strategies, and focus on the study of environmental, behavioural and genetic risk factors involved in cancer, and the design and analysis of large trials and populations studies. Both new institutes are scheduled to open in 2004. Furthermore, in a joint project with the University of Cambridge and Addenbrooke's NHS Trust, a new £40 million research institute is planned to open in 2005 in Cambridge, aiming to develop new models for tumour biology that can be translated into the treatment of human cancer. Finally, an expansion of the Beatson Institute in Glasgow is in its final planning stage.

Many scientists feel that after years of basic cancer research, we are beginning to see the benefits that stem from these efforts entering the clinic in the form of new drugs and treatments, and there has never been a greater need for strengthening the collaboration between science at the bench and bedside. In addition, 'big science' — including high-throughput technologies and studies that take advantage of genomic and proteomic information — is set to play a growing role both in basic and clinical cancer research. In the light of these developments, a major objective behind the merger was to bring together the strength of the CRC in clinical research and the ICRF in basic research. Cancer Research UK hopes that by joining forces and sharing equipment, cancer researchers in the UK will benefit from enhanced resources and gain more efficient access to the latest technologies. It also aims to increase its collaborations with other cancer research organizations, as exemplified by a new contract with the NCI to exchange resources, share best practice and facilitate the exchange of ideas and information about cancer research.

Amongst Cancer Research UK researchers, the merger is mostly greeted with cautious optimism. No one expects the transition period to be without problems and upheavals, and it remains to be seen how efficiently such a large organization can be administered. However, many express the hope that in the long run, they will have better access to equipment and resources. No doubt, raising public awareness for the new charity will be crucial in maintaining and increasing the funding necessary to obtain the envisaged boost for cancer research in the UK. □