

Exeter Clinical Research Facility

Newsletter

Issue 4, Winter 2014

Welcome to the fourth NIHR Exeter Clinical Research Facility (CRF) newsletter. The aim of this newsletter is to highlight the achievements of our facility, provide an overview of some of our main projects, and show how you can become involved, or continue to be involved, in helping us to improve healthcare through research. If you have received this letter in the post but would prefer to receive it via email instead, please email us at crf@exeter.ac.uk

RILD, The First Year –

Unlocking the “hidden secrets” of the genome

It has now been a year since the doors opened to the new home of the CRF, in the Research, Innovation, Learning and Development (RILD) building. Since then, we have recruited lots of new researchers, developed collaborations with the NHS and completed world-class innovative research. This has firmly cemented us as a centre of excellence in clinical research and patient care, and a leader in the international research arena.

On 23 October, we were visited by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osborne, and Nicky Morgan MP, Education Secretary and Minister for Women and Equalities, who announced £1.6 million of a Medical Research Council (MRC) investment will come to the University of Exeter Medical School (UEMS). This will fund ‘third generation’ DNA sequencing technology, which will enable us to

make significant advances in our understanding of the role of genetic variation in diseases such as diabetes, dementia, Alzheimer’s, and schizophrenia, and thus as Mr Osborne stated, help us to unlock the “hidden secrets” of the genome.



Above: George Osborne & Nicky Morgan talking to Peninsula Research Bank Steering Committee lay member Clive Barnett & research volunteer Lynda Adams
(Photo credit: James Millar)

The latest from Exeter 10,000

Almost 8,000 people have now participated in the Exeter 10,000 project, and over half of these have also participated in another research project.



Indeed, since the launch of Exeter 10,000 in 2010, 180 additional research projects in the fields of diabetes, ageing, strokes, psychology, sports science, medical physics and rheumatology have been added to the CRF project portfolio. All of these studies benefit from being able to access 1000s of urine and DNA samples and other medical data, which have been kindly provided by Exeter 10,000 volunteers.

Thank you to all who have helped us so far!

Help us reach our 10,000 target by recommending the project to your friends and relatives! Anyone aged 18 or over can help.

For more details, please call 01392 408181, email crf@exeter.ac.uk or visit www.exeter.crf.nihr.ac.uk/node/155

This year’s scientific findings from Exeter 10,000 and DARE

Do you find it hard to resist eating tempting high calorie foods?

If so, you are not alone. 64% of UK adults are overweight or obese, largely due to excess calorie intake. However, help is at hand. University of Exeter researchers, led by Dr Natalia Lawrence, have developed a simple online computer game that trains people to resist unhealthy snack foods. A recent study sponsored by the Wellcome Trust and recruiting Exeter 10,000 volunteers has found that 40 adults who completed four 10-minute sessions of the training online lost a significant amount of weight and ate fewer calories than they did before the study. Intriguingly, the training also appeared to reduce how much unhealthy foods were liked. These effects were observed relative to a control group of 40 adults who completed the same training with pictures of non-food objects, such as pens. Our researchers are applying for funding for larger trials in collaboration with researchers in the USA and the Netherlands.



If you are interested in taking part in further studies and trying this novel training out for yourself, please register your interest by emailing foodtraining@exeter.ac.uk. In addition, recruitment to the GATE study which is examining the Genetics of Appetite has now reached 1300, but we still need a further 700 people who have already participated in Exeter 10,000 to complete this research. This study involves completing an online survey of eating behaviour which takes about 10 minutes. If you are interested in taking part, please go to <http://survey.ex.ac.uk/gate>, where you will be asked to enter your Exeter 10,000 ID number (please call us on 01392 408181 if you need a reminder of your ID number), your height and your weight, and to answer questions about your mood and eating behaviour.

SUMMIT study results

The multi-centre SUMMIT study aims to identify early markers for the development of blood vessel complications, for example heart disease and retinopathy, associated with diabetes. Last year, we finished recruitment and baseline assessments for both the vascular and eye investigations. We have now started collecting our three year follow-up data for both investigations. Although the vascular and retinopathy imaging studies are still ongoing, it's been great to hear that some results are already coming out of the SUMMIT consortium. New factors in the blood and DNA have been identified as potential new markers for the risk of diabetes related blood vessel complications.

"What's it like to be a lay member of a Steering Committee?" Faith tells us why she got involved...

"I'm married with two children and a grandchild, and I live in rural Devon. I've been interested in health and medicine for many years, and would have liked to have trained as a doctor. So, I was delighted to be invited by Dr Gillian Baker (Manager of Exeter CRF) to work on the Peninsula Research Bank (PRB)'s Steering Committee in December 2009, five years ago.



I really enjoy meeting different researchers and clinicians, and being able to contribute to the strategic direction of the Exeter 10,000 project. We do this by reviewing the acceptability and benefit of research proposals to use DNA samples stored in the research bank (I have a vested interest as my own DNA is stored in the bank!), and inviting volunteers to participate in further research studies. We also decide whether or not any clinical interventions are acceptable to NHS patients, and if the patient literature uses language that we can actually understand. I thoroughly enjoy my time with the PRB Steering Committee, and hope to be a member for many years to come".

If you would like to become a member of our steering committee, please contact Louisa on l.allen@exeter.ac.uk or 01392 408182

Neonatal Diabetes Family Days, Exeter

This April and July, the University of Exeter and the RD&E NHS Foundation Trust hosted two international Neonatal Diabetes Family Days. 48 families with members affected by Neonatal Diabetes aged between 8 months - 53 years travelled to Exeter from all around the world, some as far afield as America and Australia, to meet others affected by the same condition for the first time in their lives. Some of those who attended have very rare types of neonatal diabetes that are also associated with additional complex medical conditions. These family days were a chance for people to learn more about their condition and to discuss their concerns with the world leaders in the field. One delegate said, "We got answers to the issues we were bothered about, and an action plan to address these."



These days were funded by the Wellcome Trust Senior Investigator Award that Profs Andrew Hattersley and Sian Ellard have been awarded as part of seven years of funding for Neonatal Diabetes. As a result of the research completed during the April day, new guidelines on the mutation that causes the developmental delay associated with Neonatal Diabetes have been produced, and are now being used in routine clinical care. Moreover, some patients have even been able to come off insulin treatment as a result of this research.



Diabetes Research - we are looking for

- patients who have recently been diagnosed with diabetes
- patients who are about to start a new diabetes treatment

Please call us on 01392 408181

A new clinical trial to see whether **dementia** can be prevented is being run at the CRF. The team are looking to recruit people over 65 years old who have not yet been diagnosed with memory problems.

Please contact us on 01392 408181 if you are interested in finding out more

The NIHR have asked us to let you know about a questionnaire to gather your opinions on the leaflets that accompany medications, and how you think they can be improved. If you have an hour, have diabetes, atrial fibrillation (AF) or have suffered from breast cancer, and would like to participate, please visit www.visualize-protect.eu. Please specify that you were referred from the Royal Devon & Exeter NHS Foundation Trust and that you have received the online announcement from NIHR Exeter CRF. Thank you.

