

## **Multi-million pound *UK Biobank* underway – Manchester area trailblazes revolutionary medical project**

*UK Biobank*, a visionary medical project aimed at improving the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of cancer, heart disease, diabetes and many other serious conditions is launched this week after several years of meticulous planning.

Up to three thousand people living in the south Manchester area are being given the opportunity to trailblaze the project before it goes nationwide later this year.

They are being sent invitations to take part in the start-up phase of *UK Biobank* – a revolutionary research undertaking that will eventually recruit half a million volunteers aged 40 to 69.

The project – a UK world first – will gather, store and protect a vast bank of medical data and material that will allow researchers to study in depth, in decades to come, how the complex interplay of genes, lifestyle and environment affect our risk of disease. Because it will involve thousands of people who eventually go on to contract each particular disease *UK Biobank* will provide a uniquely rich resource that allows researchers to identify more reliably than ever before why some people develop a specific disease and others do not.

"Nothing like this has been attempted before in such fine detail on such a vast scale," said Professor Rory Collins, *UK Biobank*'s Principal Investigator, who is also Professor of Medicine & Epidemiology at the University of Oxford. "It's been known for a long time that the risk of getting a particular disease often involves a combination of environment, lifestyle, genes – and chance – but all studies to date have had limitations, which mean we still don't have a clear picture of how these different elements interact. By being so large and detailed, *UK Biobank* will be able to study many different risk factors together, each of which may have only modest effects on the likelihood of getting some particular disease."

Taking part will involve the first volunteers spending about an hour at an assessment centre in Altrincham, Cheshire, answering some questions, having some standard measurements taken and giving small blood and urine samples. They will also be asked to agree to allow their health to be followed by *UK Biobank* for many years directly through routine medical and other health-related records.

The objective of the initial phase of recruitment is to make sure all of the planned procedures go smoothly before the study gets underway nationwide later in the year, when around eight to 10 assessment centres will be running at any one time around the UK.

Sir Alan Langlands, the Chair of *UK Biobank*'s Board and previously Chief Executive of the NHS, said: "The NHS treats the largest single group of people anywhere in the world and it keeps detailed records from birth to death. From these records we can identify men and women to invite who are aged between 40 and 69. This age group includes many people who are at risk of developing a wide range of disabling and life-threatening conditions over the new few decades. So, following them through their health records will allow researchers to work out why some develop a particular disease, while others do not. This should help enormously in the development of new ways to prevent and treat disease."

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