

Wednesday 9 July 2008

UK BIOBANK OPENS ITS DOORS IN BRISTOL

A major UK medical research initiative launches in Bristol today (Wednesday 9 July), as part of a nationwide battle against a wide range of serious and life-threatening illnesses.

UK Biobank hopes that many people in Bristol and the surrounding towns who are currently being invited by letter to take part in the ambitious project will rise to the challenge to improve the health of future generations.

The world-leading initiative will recruit 500 40-69 year-olds a week from the city and the surrounding area (including Clevedon, Portishead, Axbridge, Bath, Bradford-on-Avon, Trowbridge and Frome) over the next six months, and, with their permission, follow their health over the next 30 years or more.

People who agree to join the project will help future generations live freer of diseases that kill and disable. Information collected by UK Biobank is made anonymous, so researchers will not be able to identify those people who have contributed to this multi-million pound study.

As UK Biobank matures it will become an unparalleled treasure chest of vital information on a range of diseases, including cancer, heart disease, diabetes, stroke, dementia, depression, arthritis, osteoporosis and many other life-threatening and debilitating conditions.

In particular, it will provide insight into why some people get particular diseases and others do not – paving the way for better prevention and treatments.

The project is supported by a number of leading medical charities such as CRUK, British Heart Foundation, Diabetes UK, British Lung Foundation, Arthritis Research Campaign, National Osteoporosis Society and the Skin Care Campaign, as well as by the Royal College of General Practitioners and the NHS.

Also supporting the project is TV presenter Nick Ross, who will appear on a city wide bus advertising campaign.

Participants will attend a 90-minute UK Biobank assessment when they will be asked about their current health and lifestyles and have a number of measurements taken (such as blood pressure, weight, lung function and bone density), and donate a small amount of blood and urine. With their permission, UK Biobank will track their health over the next 30 years and more.

The assessment centre opens today on the Lower Ground Floor, Vintry House, Wine Street, Bristol, BS1 2BD.

Oxford University's Professor Rory Collins, UK Biobank's Principal Investigator, said: "This is a fantastic opportunity for people to do something positive for the health of the next generations."

The UK Biobank resource will help untangle the complex interplay of nature (that is, genes) and nurture (such as lifestyle) in the development of many different diseases.

The ambitious project has already recruited more than 140,000 people, towards its goal of 500,000. Recruitment is currently underway in north Manchester, Stoke, Leeds, Newcastle-upon-Tyne and Reading. Centres in Oxford, Glasgow, Cardiff, Edinburgh and south Manchester have now completed their recruitment.

Around 15 million blood and urine samples will eventually be stored for decades in specially designed laboratories near Manchester, at temperatures down to about minus 200°C. The archive facility was one of four finalists in this year's prestigious Royal Academy of Engineering MacRobert Award.

Taking part in UK Biobank is entirely voluntary and participants will be able to withdraw at any time should they wish to do so.

UK Biobank is a collaborative effort between 22 UK universities. The project is funded by the Wellcome Trust, Medical Research Council, the Department of Health, Northwest Regional Development Agency and the Scottish Government. It is hosted by the University of Manchester, and has secured approval from the relevant ethics and regulatory groups in relation to its research remit, recruitment process, storage of blood and urine samples, and access to participants' medical records over many years.

UK Biobank is governed by an Ethics and Governance Framework and its activities are monitored by an independent Ethics and Governance Council to help look after the public interest.

Web link: www.ukbiobank.ac.uk

Ends