

Tuesday, June 5, 2007

TWO MAJOR HEALTH PROJECTS RECRUIT IN SCOTLAND

The call goes out this week to the people of Scotland to take part in two ambitious health projects targeting many diseases that cause pain and suffering across the country.

UK Biobank and Generation Scotland are seeking to improve the health of future generations.

They will target diseases such as cancer, heart disease, diabetes, Parkinson's and Alzheimer's diseases, mental health illnesses, osteoporosis and arthritis. Both studies are gold standard in their design and execution.

Information gathered over the next five years by UK Biobank and Generation Scotland will mature in time to provide the most detailed treasure trove of health information ever collected.

Sir Alan Langlands, Chair of UK Biobank and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Dundee, today underlined the importance of both projects to health research in Scotland.

"These are landmark initiatives which will improve the life expectancy and the health of our children, our grandchildren and their children," he said.

"I can think of many researchers who wish such a project had commenced ten, fifteen or twenty years ago because it will be a powerful tool in improving people's health for many years to come.

"These two studies have taken many years of planning by some of Scotland's leading health researchers. They will work together to free future generations from many life-threatening and debilitating diseases.

"Scotland has a long and distinguished history in medical innovation and research. These two studies continue that pioneering spirit and will be seen as landmarks in the health landscape in the future."

TWO STUDIES, ONE VISION

Generation Scotland and UK Biobank differ in their scientific approach but are complementary and the results from each study will add to and inform the other.

- Generation Scotland focuses on families and how the personal characteristics we inherit from our parents (genes) are connected with the chances of developing illness or responding to treatment; it

will also explore how to identify relevant genes in individuals' blood samples;

- UK Biobank will study the relationship between the genes that have been identified, our lifestyles and our current health to find out why some people develop certain illnesses and others do not.

Sir Alan added: "Working in partnership with the people of Scotland, these complex, long-term studies will make a significant contribution to the health of future generations."

Professor Anna Dominiczak, who leads both Generation Scotland and UK Biobank at the University of Glasgow, added: "Glasgow and the BHF Centre are appropriate places to launch these initiatives as our goal is to fight chronic diseases such as heart disease, diabetes, stroke and cancer.

"While doing this, we wish to change the image of Scotland and Glasgow from being the sick man of Europe to becoming a centre of excellence in fighting disease."

UK Biobank launches its campaign in Glasgow this week when thousands of invitations will be delivered to people living in the city. UK Biobank's ultimate goal is to recruit 500,000 40-69 year-olds from across Britain and follow their health for up to 30 years and more. It will roll out across Scotland in due course.

Generation Scotland, launched in February 2006, is currently ramping up recruitment of family members in Glasgow and Tayside, aiming ultimately for 50,000 people from across Scotland. They will be invited to provide a blood sample and key health information, and their health will be similarly followed up long-term.

Andrew Morris, Chair of the Generation Scotland Scientific Committee, said: "Now that human chromosomes have been sequenced and genes identified, the time is right to start looking for the genetic clues that play a crucial role in advancing the prevention and treatment of disabling, debilitating and life-threatening diseases.

"The collaboration between Generation Scotland and UK Biobank puts Scotland and the UK at the forefront of these new scientific discoveries internationally."

Professor Rory Collins, UK Biobank Principal Investigator, said both projects rely on people's altruism to succeed. "We're asking for people to help us build and to be a part of a fantastic resource that will allow doctors and scientists of the future access to an unrivalled source of information on a wide range of diseases.

“This resource will strengthen massively as it matures; the longer we can follow people the better,” he said.

Chief Medical Officer Dr Harry Burns said: “The launch of these two complementary studies offers a great opportunity for the Scottish people to contribute to knowledge about many chronic diseases that pose significant public health problems in Scotland, and possibly the development of new treatments and preventative strategies.

“The Chief Scientist Office of the Scottish Executive has committed significant funds to both projects in recognition of the importance of these studies and the potential long-term benefits to health.”

Both Generation Scotland and UK Biobank involve a consortium of scientists in Scotland, at the Universities of Glasgow, Aberdeen, Dundee and Edinburgh.

UK Biobank is funded by the Scottish Executive, Wellcome Trust, Medical Research Council and the Department of Health. Generation Scotland has received funding of £4.4 million and £1.8 million from the Scottish Executive and the Scottish Funding Council, respectively.

Ends

Notes for Editors

1. UK Biobank will eventually write to many of the 40-69 year-olds living in Scotland, to ask them to take part. Those who agree will be asked to attend an assessment centre (the first one is in Glasgow) where they will fill out a lifestyle questionnaire, have body measurements recorded (such as bone density, blood pressure, height and weight), and donate a small sample of blood and urine for long term storage as a resource for researchers in the future. They will also consent to long term follow up of their medical health. www.ukbiobank.ac.uk
2. Generation Scotland relies on working in partnership with Scottish GPs and individual families. GPs write to invite their patients to participate in the study. As it is a family-based study, those registering interest are then asked to determine the interest of other adult family members. These partnerships arrangements are working well. To date, more than 2,500 people have attended one of the study clinics where information on medical history and lifestyle; physical and psychological measures, a sample of blood and consent to long-term follow up through electronic health records are obtained. This information will also be a resource for researchers in the future. The Glasgow study clinic is in the new BHF; Glasgow Cardiovascular Research Centre. For more information on Generation Scotland visit: www.generationscotland.org
3. The Medical Research Council is dedicated to improving human health through excellent science. It invests on behalf of the UK taxpayer. Its work ranges from molecular level science to public health research, carried out in universities, hospitals and a network of its own units and institutes. The MRC liaises with the Health Departments, the National Health Service and industry to take account of the public's needs. The results have led to some of the most significant discoveries in medical science and benefited the health and wealth of millions of people in the UK and around the world.
4. The Wellcome Trust is the largest charity in the UK and the second largest medical research charity in the world. It funds innovative biomedical research, in the UK and internationally, spending around £500 million each year to support the brightest scientists with the best ideas. The Wellcome Trust supports public debate about biomedical research and its impact on health and wellbeing. Website: www.wellcome.ac.uk

5. The British Heart Foundation (BHF) is leading the battle against heart and circulatory disease - the UK's biggest killer. The charity is a major funder and authority in cardiovascular research. It plays an important role in funding education, both of the public and of health professionals, and in providing life-saving cardiac equipment and support for rehabilitation and care. For more information on the BHF, visit www.bhf.org.uk