

Cancer Trials Ireland calls for cancer drug trial participation to double to 6%

International Clinical Trials Day marked with launch of Just Ask Your Doctor! Campaign to encourage people diagnosed with cancer to ask about joining a cancer trial

(Dublin, Friday 19 May 2017): Cancer Trials Ireland has called on the Government to support a doubling of the number of people with cancer participating in cancer drug trials from the current rate of 3% to 6%.

Cancer trials can provide people with cancer with free access to new promising treatments which in some cases can only be accessed through a trial. These treatments have the potential to enhance and extend their lives as well as supporting the development of new treatments for future generations. Around 650 people with cancer join a cancer drug trial each year and Cancer Trials Ireland wants to double this to 1300 each year.

Cancer Trials Ireland is the leading clinical trials organisation in Ireland. It carries out more trials than all other organisations combined. Its trials are carried out through an independent network of 14 cancer trials research units in hospitals across the country.

To mark International Clinical Trials Day (20th May), Cancer Trials Ireland is rolling out its ***Just Ask Your Doctor!*** campaign. The campaign is designed to encourage people living with cancer to ask their doctor if there is a relevant cancer trial that they can join to enhance their treatment options. Alternatively, people can visit its new website cancertrials.ie where they can access information about cancer trials and a full list of trials currently underway in Ireland.

Speaking at the launch, Professor Bryan Hennessy, Clinical Lead with Cancer Trials Ireland and Consultant Oncologist at Beaumont Hospital said: "Cancer trial participation is a no-brainer. Cancer trials find treatments that stop people dying from cancer, they enable patients to get treatments not available by other means and they save the HSE more than €6 million annually in cancer medication costs. With a more stable economic outlook and one in three of us affected by cancer in Ireland, it is time for the Government to increase its commitment in Budget 2018 to cancer trials research by at least €2.5 million annually. We also want the Government to mainstream cancer trials as one of an array of treatment options for all who have been diagnosed with cancer. Cancer trials must not be seen as an outlier in the treatment of cancer."

There are currently almost 100 cancer trials recruiting patients in Ireland. A further 50 trials are under way but have completed their recruitment phase. There are up to 6000 patients involved in all of these trials.

Currently, there are trials ongoing in the following areas:

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Breast cancer x 17	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Melanoma x 2
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lung cancer x 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Genitourinary cancer x 11
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Head and neck cancer x 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Paediatric x 24
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Central Nervous System x 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gastrointestinal cancer x 11
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gynaecology cancer x 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Haematology and lymphoma x 13
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Basket (multiple cancer types) x3	

The numbers of clinical trials covering all therapeutic areas open in Ireland, and consequently the number of opportunities for patients, lags behind our European counterparts. Denmark, which has a similar population size, conducts over four times as many clinical trials as Ireland. Norway also has a similar population and carries out twice as many clinical trials.

Speaking at the launch of the campaign, Eibhlin Mulroe, CEO, Cancer Trials Ireland, said that Ireland had huge growth potential in cancer trials: “Cancer Trials Ireland works with the foremost oncologists and research specialists across the country who are highly experienced and skilled in trials research. Combined with the commitment of those participating in our trials, and Brexit, we have a tremendous opportunity to step up our cancer trials capability and make a greater contribution to the global pursuit of the answers to cancer. There is a huge opportunity for us to attract many more trials from other parts of the world which can open up new treatment options for people with cancer that are currently not available, and at a relatively low cost. This International Clinical Trials Day, we are encouraging all who are living with cancer to *Just Ask Their Doctor* about cancer trials and whether there is one that is suitable for them and to visit cancertrials.ie to access a full listing of trials that are currently underway in Ireland. Participation is hugely important.”

Emily Hourican, author, journalist and cancer survivor said: “My world was turned upside down when I was diagnosed with HPV-induced cancer of the tongue base. I was terrified and miserable, but felt lucky in that I was eligible for a trial that would give me access to a more targeted form of treatment than standard chemotherapy. Seven weeks of treatment, while very difficult personally and for my family, saw me free of cancer. For that, I will always be grateful, and consider myself incredibly lucky. I feel that being on the trial made a difference to me in terms of how I approached treatment - knowing that my hard times might one day be of benefit to someone else was something that kept me going and gave me a focus beyond the immediate misery of my situation. I would encourage anyone diagnosed with cancer to ask about and participate in a trial, if eligible to do so. I know it helped me to get through, and I hope the trial results will help other cancer patients in the future.”

The incidence of cancer continues to rise in Ireland, increasing steadily from 15,393 cases in 2003 to 20,362 cases in 2013. It is the second largest cause of death in the EU. During this time, mortality has decreased with five-year survival data showing an increase from 53.3% survival to 59.9% in the period 2008 – 2012. The decrease in mortality is partly because of the development of new and improved medications which can only be made available due to cancer trials. The European Commission’s target is to reduce cancer incidence by 15% by 2020.

Cancer Trials Ireland is supported by the Health Research Board and the Irish Cancer Society.

Cancer Trials Ireland’s *Just Ask Your Doctor!* has been part-funded by unrestricted grants from the pharmaceutical companies MSD, Bayer, Janssen, Novartis, Merck and Roche.

To find out more about the *Just Ask Your Doctor!* campaign, visit cancertrials.ie/just-ask/

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