

## **Cancer Trials Ireland Announces Creation of Pat Smullen Chair in Pancreatic Cancer at University College Dublin**

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Cancer Trials Ireland, the national organisation dedicated to advancing cancer clinical trials, has today announced the creation of the Pat Smullen Chair in Pancreatic Cancer at University College Dublin (UCD). The new position will anchor expertise in pancreatic research in Ireland with the ambition of creating a global centre of excellence for treatment and research of this form of cancer which has one of the poorest outcomes.

“The position will receive €900,000 (€180,000 per annum) in funding over five years from Cancer Trials Ireland’s Pat Smullen Pancreatic Cancer Fund with matching funding for the role from the HSE National Cancer Control Programme (NCCP),” says **Eibhlín Mulroe, CEO of Cancer Trials Ireland**. “UCD will then take over Cancer Trials Ireland funding contribution to continue the partnership with the HSE NCCP.”

The new Chair will share their time between their clinical work as a treating physician at St Vincent’s University Hospital – the national surgical centre for pancreatic cancer – and their research work at UCD School of Medicine. At UCD, they will work to identify, attract, open and monitor new pancreatic cancer trials for patients in Ireland. UCD School of Medicine is welcoming applications for the position from today.

Ms Mulroe continues: “The Pat Smullen Pancreatic Cancer Fund arises from various fundraising endeavours undertaken by champion jockey, Pat Smullen, his family, and the horse racing community, following his diagnosis with pancreatic cancer in March 2018. The inaugural fundraising event – the Irish Champions Weekend – raised €2.6m in September 2019, with further fundraising events having raised an additional €367,000 to date.

“Sadly, Pat died in September 2020, but his legacy lives on and the fund he created includes new treatment options for 174 patients with pancreatic cancer, at no cost to themselves, or to the State. The announcement of this Chair position will help to further develop the research infrastructure in place in hospitals, meaning we will be better able to support the development of pancreatic cancer clinical trials and be ready to take full advantage of important treatment advances when they come along.”

## **Global Leader**

**For Professor Ray McDermott, Clinical Lead for Cancer Trials Ireland – and Pat Smullen’s treating doctor – the new Chair in Pancreatic Cancer will see patients reaping the rewards:**

“This is a huge step forward towards making Ireland a global leader in pancreatic cancer research and treatment. A position like this is intended to attract a world expert in the disease, who, in turn, will garner the attention of other leading clinicians wishing to work jointly and develop partnerships. Pharmaceutical companies developing treatments in this space will also want to get involved and I have no doubt that Irish patients will reap the rewards of this exciting development in the near future. I commend the vision of Cancer Trials Ireland, University College Dublin, the HSE National Cancer Control Programme and, most of all, Pat’s wife, Frances Crowley, in coming together to make all of this possible.”

**For Frances Crowley, wife of the late Pat Smullen, the announcement builds on new treatment options for pancreatic cancer that would not have arisen but for the funds raised:**

“The Pat Smullen Pancreatic Cancer Fund has already brought new treatment options to people in Ireland that weren’t there in 2019. Now, just four years later, one trial has concluded, another has just opened, recruiting its first patient in late June, a third will open in the coming months, while a fourth is in the pipeline for late 2023/early 2024.

“With this funding, the aim is to put pancreatic cancer research onto a more stable and promising footing, and I know that’s what Pat wanted to achieve when we set about the Irish Champions Weekend fundraiser in 2019. Thanks to the unswerving support of the horse racing community, Pat’s friends, and many others whose lives have been affected by pancreatic cancer, we are able to make the long-term funding commitment that the Pat Smullen Chair in Pancreatic Cancer needs. We are very excited for the future.”

**Speaking at the launch of the establishment of the Pat Smullen Chair in Pancreatic Cancer, Dean and Head of UCD School of Medicine, Professor Michael Keane says:**

“The hosting of the Pat Smullen Chair in Pancreatic Cancer at UCD School of Medicine is consistent with UCD’s strategic priority to be a research-intensive university. This new position, recruitment for which is open from today, will see the development and implementation of robust and innovative research programmes in pancreatic cancer. With

teaching hours included as part of the role, the appointee will contribute to the academic development of the 3,300 undergraduate and postgraduate students at UCD School of Medicine. The position is an excellent opportunity for the successful candidate to drive research and teaching activities in an ambitious academic environment.

“I want to take this opportunity to share UCD School of Medicine’s gratitude with Cancer Trials Ireland and the Smullen family for their philanthropic support for the establishment of this new chair. It is thanks to support like theirs that cancer research and teaching continues to advance, improving our knowledge of the disease, its diagnosis, therapeutic manipulation, and, ultimately, patient outcomes.”

### **Challenging to Treat**

According to the Irish Cancer Society, there are approximately 620 people diagnosed with pancreatic cancer each year in Ireland. Unfortunately, the disease is both challenging to treat and to study. Biopsies of pancreatic cancer can be difficult to get, due to the location of the pancreas, and even when large tumour samples are extracted, they often provide very few cancer cells to study, due to the diffuse spread of cells in surrounding tissue. In addition, as its incidence is lower than more common forms of cancer, such as breast, lung, and colorectal cancers, to date, pancreatic cancer hasn’t seen the same levels of attention that other cancers attract.

Research funded by the Pat Smullen Pancreatic Cancer Fund so far:

- A total of 15 patients have been recruited to a Paricalcitol trial around improving chemotherapy effectiveness in people with newly diagnosed pancreatic cancer
- A total of 22 patients will be recruited to a trial for patients with advanced stage pancreatic cancer that have failed treatment. The first patient was recruited in late June.
- A new radiotherapy study has been developed to investigate if a novel radiation delivery technique can improve outcomes in 67 patients with operable/borderline-operable pancreatic cancer
- A study, known as the FEED study, has been submitted for ethical approval that will recruit 70 patients for a nutritional intervention to strengthen patient resilience and recovery from pancreas tumour surgery

- Funding of €100,000 provided for a Next Generation Sequencer (NGS) machine in St Vincent's University Hospital (important in the treatment of pancreatico-biliary cancer). The hospital expects two new appointments in molecular pathology returning from Harvard Medical School this summer on the back of this initiative.

For more information on the work of Cancer Trials Ireland, visit [www.cancertrials.ie](http://www.cancertrials.ie), and on the Pat Smullen Pancreatic Cancer Fund, visit [www.cancertrials.ie/pat-smullen](http://www.cancertrials.ie/pat-smullen)

## **ENDS**

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### **Notes to editors:**

Information for suitably qualified persons on how to apply for the position of Pat Smullen Chair in Pancreatic Cancer [is available here](#).

### **About Cancer Trials Ireland**

Cancer Trials Ireland is a registered charity and the leading cancer research trials organisation in Ireland. It aims to provide every patient with cancer access to high-quality and potentially life-altering cancer trials and to make Ireland a highly attractive location to open cancer trials.

Since 2000, 623 cancer trials have opened in Ireland, with more than 33,500 patients taking part. In 2022, a survey of public attitudes revealed three in five people in Ireland would take part in a clinical trial. Almost all cancer clinical trials available in Ireland are listed on the Cancer Trials Ireland website: [www.cancertrials.ie/open-trials](http://www.cancertrials.ie/open-trials).

Cancer Trials Ireland is partly funded by the Health Research Board and the Irish Cancer Society. It also receives income from pharmaceutical companies and international research groups, as well as through philanthropic giving and donations from members of the public.