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**TOP MEDICAL SCIENTISTS CALL FOR MORE RESEARCH WITHIN THE NHS TO BENEFIT PATIENTS**

The Government's modernisation of the NHS will be flawed unless it responds to the rapid pace of medical discovery; a new **National Network for Clinical Research** should be created to develop clinical research facilities within the NHS; and the NHS should reconfirm its original goal of placing one and a half per cent of its turnover into clinical research activities.

These are the main conclusions of a new Report '*Strengthening Clinical Research*' published today by the independent Academy of Medical Sciences. The Report's authors are fourteen of Britain's leading medical scientists from universities, the Health Service and industry. The Report's recommendations are summarised in this week's British Medical Journal.

John Bell, Oxford University's Regius Professor of Medicine and chairman of the working group said 'The reintroduction of effective clinical research should form a key part of the Government's vital process of modernising the NHS. This investment will benefit patients most of all and help the NHS to target its resources effectively.'

He continued 'Clinical research in the UK has not kept pace with rapid advances in basic scientific discovery and this increasingly disadvantages patients. Yet the NHS is probably better placed than any health care system in the world to undertake large scale trials. Look, for example, at all that was achieved for children with leukaemia as a result of the extensive clinical research of the 1970s and 1980s'

The Academy Report urges the creation of a new National Network for Clinical Research funded by the NHS. The Academy calls on the Medical Research Council, medical charities and the biotechnology and pharmaceutical industries to join in partnership with the NHS to support the Network's proposed activities.

The Network would create the necessary infrastructure for clinical trials and research throughout the Health Service. Targets for research would include cancer, diabetes, respiratory problems, mental health, illnesses of the bone and joint, cardiovascular disease/stroke and neurodegenerative diseases.

Less than twenty per cent of the current limited resources allocated to NHS research appear to be spent on its funding of clinical research projects – just a tenth of one per cent of total NHS turnover. The Report says there is now a particular lack of support for experimental medicine and clinical trials. The continued failure to maintain these areas of research could have severe consequences for the entire biomedical research base in the UK. The Report draws on the examples of Canada and Germany to show how other developed countries are tackling the research challenge within their healthcare systems.

The Report also addresses the need to strengthen the role of the 'endangered' clinical scientist within the NHS, to build public understanding of the benefits of medical research and to develop an appropriate ethical framework. The Wellcome Trust Clinical Research Facility at Edinburgh's Western General Hospital is cited as a working example of such a clinical research facility.

## **NOTES FOR EDITORS**

The independent Academy of Medical Sciences promotes advances in medical science and campaigns to ensure these are translated as quickly as possible into benefits for patients. The Academy's seven hundred and fifty Fellows are the United Kingdom's leading medical scientists from hospitals, academia, industry and the public service.

Copies of the Report "*Strengthening Clinical Research*" are available from:  
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