Cancer Research UK response to NIHR Clinical Research Network consultation on proposals for the designation of clinical themes

February 2013

Cancer Research UK warmly welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation. Since its establishment in 2001, the National Institute for Health Research Cancer Network (NCRN) has been integral in revolutionising the approach to cancer research in the NHS. Over 330,000 people have taken part in NCRN supported research studies since 2001. The NCRN also has a world-class reputation for increasing participation in cancer clinical research. Prior to its creation it was estimated that fewer than 4 in every 100 newly diagnosed cancer patients were entering clinical studies. By 2010/11 this had risen to the equivalent of 20 in every 100 newly diagnosed cancer patients recruited into studies – representing the highest levels in the world.

It is therefore vital that the transition of the NIHR Clinical Research Network (CRN), from Topic and Specific Networks to 15 geographically-based Local Clinical Research Networks working around clinical themes, enables continued improvement in the delivery of cancer clinical research. The broad clinical engagement that has been enabled through the Clinical Studies Group structure should not be lost. It is also essential that the well-established expertise built up within the NCRN workforce is embedded throughout the evolved structures, and not diluted by the necessity to work across various themes.

We broadly understand the proposed structure as outlined in the consultation document, and welcome the continuation of cancer as a theme. However, we would like to make the following comments:

- **National Thematic Leadership:** We welcome the role that national thematic leadership will play in the new structures, and look forward to further clarity on how this role will interact with the local thematic leadership posts. It would be useful to have more detail on how the national thematic lead will be expected to 'engage with funders of studies on the themes portfolio'.

- **Local thematic leadership team:** We welcome the move to ensure that each of the 15 Local Clinical Research Networks will have a theme lead, who will sit on the CRN's Clinical Advisory Group. However, we would like further clarity on the roles of Theme Managers and the Theme Management team, and assurances that sufficient resource and expertise for cancer will be available in each Local Clinical Research Network. We are particularly concerned that the workforce in the Theme Management Teams maintain expertise in specialist areas, for example we would want to ensure that research nurse specialism in oncology is not lost as this could significantly impact on recruitment and data quality.

- **UK wide approach:** Given the significant proportion of studies in the portfolio that are UK wide we hope that sufficient consideration has been given to how the proposed changes will impact on the devolved nations. It is essential that UK-wide studies are not negatively impacted by these changes, and would like further clarity on how it is envisaged the evolved network will operate across the UK.

We hope are comments are useful, if you would like to discuss these further please contact Emma Greenwood on Emma.Greenwood@cancer.org.uk or on 0203 469 8358.

About Cancer Research UK

Every year around 300,000 people are diagnosed with cancer in the UK. Every year more than 150,000 people die from cancer. Cancer Research UK is the world's leading cancer charity dedicated to saving lives through research. Together with our partners and supporters, Cancer Research UK's vision is to bring forward the day when all cancers are cured. We support research into all aspects of cancer through the work of over 4,000 scientists, doctors and nurses. In 2011/12 we spent £332 million on research. The charity's pioneering work has been at the heart of the progress that has already seen survival rates in the UK double in the last forty years. We receive no government funding for our research.