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**PRESS RELEASE**

Ireland's first and most comprehensive Cervical Screening Research Consortium - **CERVIVA** - launched with €1.25 million funding from Health Research Board

(Embargo Wednesday 1st November 2006 @ 0700) A ground breaking cervical screening and cancer research initiative known as **CERVIVA** will be launched today at the Burlington Hotel, D4. **CERVIVA** is the umbrella name for the Irish Cervical Screening Research Consortium which is a multi-investigator collaboration encompassing researchers at seven Irish universities, eight hospitals and ten commercial diagnostic/ biotechnology companies. The purpose of the Health Research Board funded Consortium is to instigate and advance high quality peer-reviewed research programmes that provide the best possible information and guidance in the delivery of cervical screening services to women living in Ireland. It is anticipated that the Consortium will deliver the results of its research within five years.

The key aims of **CERVIVA** - the Irish Cervical Screening Research Consortium have been cited as follows;

- To provide evidence that will inform the Irish public of issues and advances in the area of cervical screening.
- To demonstrate the relative merits of different screening regimes to ensure that the optimum screening procedures are deployed across Irish cytology laboratories where cervical smears are analysed.
- To increase awareness and support for research into diseases of the cervix
- To critically assess current practices to ensure that all women with a diagnosis of cervical pre-cancer and/or cervical cancer receive the most appropriate and sophisticated management of their disease.
- To lobby for the effective deployment of resources leading to the best possible treatment of women with cervical pre-cancer and cervical cancer.
- Develop novel solutions that will promote the early detection and effective intervention of diseases of the cervix
- To support education and outreach programmes that increase awareness among both Irish women and General Practitioners of screening, Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) vaccination and intervention . Exposure to Human Papilloma Virus and lack of screening are the biggest risk factors for developing cervical cancer.

Speaking about the launch of the Consortium Professor John O'Leary, Professor of Pathology, Trinity College Dublin, Coombe Women's Hospital (the hospital which is leading the Consortium) and St James Hospital said 'This exciting and potentially powerful research initiative has brought together a group of 56 scientists, gynaecologists, microbiologists, pathologists and histopathologists, genito-urinary

physicians and virologists amongst others from seven Irish universities, eight hospitals and ten commercial diagnostic/ biotechnology companies across the country. Over the next five years these experts will conduct revolutionary research and find ways for all women to have access to the very best cervical screening procedures and the very best treatment opportunities. We are also fully committed to ensuring that all women living in Ireland understand that exposure to Human Papilloma Virus can cause cervical cancer and understand the appropriateness of receiving a vaccination against Human Papilloma Virus to prevent cervical cancer, in conjunction with regular screening".

There are eight individual component projects within the **CERVIVA** Research programme and two of these will be highlighted at the launch today;

- Dr. Linda Sharp, Epidemiologist, National Cancer Registry will speak about the project she is leading which is titled *Attitudes of women to cervical screening and HPV oncogenic testing; a population based survey* - As a long term strategy it is hoped that testing for the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) will become part of routine cervical screening however this may cause concern for women in Ireland so to be fully prepared for this stage it is important to find out what women in Ireland know about current cervical screening methods and Human Papilloma Virus, Human Papilloma Virus vaccination, what their attitudes are towards using Human Papilloma Virus testing as part of cervical screening, and what effect testing for Human Papilloma Virus might have on women.
- Professor John O'Leary, Professor of Pathology, Trinity College Dublin, Coombe Women's Hospital and St James's Hospital will speak about the project he is leading which is titled *Examination of the effect of introducing a HPV (Human Papilloma Virus) vaccine in the Irish population: a longitudinal analysis of risk* - With the recent introduction of a HPV vaccine to Ireland the combined use of cervical screening and a Human Papilloma Virus prophylactic vaccination programme heralds a new area in cervical cancer prevention. CERVIVA intends to examine the effect of introducing a Human Papilloma Virus vaccine in the Irish population; specifically focussing on the influence of HLA haplotypes [immune response genes] on vaccine efficacy and through a novel antibody screening approach it will attempt to stratify vaccine responses in vaccinated women.

The work of **CERVIVA** - the Irish Cervical Screening Research Consortium is one of six projects funded by the Health Research Board (HRB) this year under the health services R&D awards. The aim of these awards is to help develop a research culture within the health system which enables research to take place and in turn helps to ensure that the findings translate into improved patient care and help to achieve the health system's goals.

According to HRB Chief Executive, Dr Ruth Barrington 'We are investing in research and development projects that will provide quality evidence that can be used to address particular challenges of health, social well-being and service delivery in Ireland. I am confident that this cervical screening project will have both a significant impact on increasing the research capacity of Irish health services, and have a positive impact on health care and service delivery in an area where there is a clear need'.

The eight individual component projects proposed within the **CERVIVA** - Irish Cervical Screening Research Consortium are:

- Introduction of automated cytology: cost base analysis as compared with manual screening
- Introduction of a virtual slide based EQA system in Irish cytopathology
- Attitudes of women to cervical screening and HPV oncogenic testing: a population based survey
- Cervical screening and Human Papilloma Virus out reach programme
- HPV DNA and mRNA testing in the Irish population
- Screening HIV positive women for HPV RNA transforming genes as a role in the prevention of cervical cancer in this population
- Examination of the effect of introducing a HPV vaccine in the Irish population: a longitudinal analysis of risk
- Development of cervical biochips/ biosensors

The National Cancer Registry estimates that there are approximately 1,000 new cases of cervical pre-cancer where abnormalities in the cervix have been detected, 200 new cases of cervical cancer and 70 deaths from cervical cancer every year, which is one of the highest rates in Western Europe. Ireland has no free nationwide cervical screening programme unlike many of its European counterparts however following the publication of the National Cancer Strategy in June 2008, the Government has undertaken to roll this out by 2008.

For further information on the cervical smear tests and/or cervical cancer Freefone the National Cancer Helpline on 1800 200 700 (week days 9am - 5pm, Tuesdays until 9pm).

**- Ends -**