

All-Ireland MS Research Network provides hope to those affected by multiple sclerosis

Call for undergraduate and early postgraduate multiple sclerosis researchers to apply for AIMS-RN Research Summer Scholarships

Wednesday, 24 February, 2021: Researchers at RCSI University of Medicine and Health Sciences, NUI Galway and Queen's University Belfast have today launched the All-Ireland MS Research Network.

The All-Ireland MS Research Network will be the largest collaboration of multiple sclerosis researchers across the island of Ireland, providing a unique opportunity for scientists, clinicians and people with multiple sclerosis in Ireland to accelerate MS research, going from the patient to the bench and bringing basic research back to benefit the patient. The network holds potential to limit the progression of MS, to train future generations of MS researchers and to contribute to global MS research.

Multiple sclerosis is one of the most common causes of neurological disability in young people and is increasing in incidence and prevalence around the world. Currently, there are approximately 13,500 people on the island of Ireland living with MS (4,500 in Northern Ireland and 9,000 in the Republic of Ireland).

The goals of the All-Ireland MS Research Network are to:

- **Deliver** cutting-edge research in multiple sclerosis that focuses on limiting disease progression
- **Train** the next generations of leaders in multiple sclerosis research
- **Communicate** multiple sclerosis research activities and discoveries to the public, research community and key stakeholders
- **Collaborate** on multiple sclerosis research programmes nationally and internationally to achieve the mission of the network

The network's founding investigators are Dr Claire McCoy, RCSI; Dr Una FitzGerald and Dr Jill McMahon, NUI Galway; and Professor Denise Fitzgerald, Dr Alerie Guzman de la Fuente and Dr Yvonne Dombrowski, Queen's University Belfast. Together, they have reached out to dozens of multi-disciplinary multiple sclerosis researchers on both sides of the border, drawn from hospitals, MS day-care centres, universities, and from those who have multiple sclerosis.

Network participant **Dr Chris McGuigan**, consultant neurologist, St. Vincent's University Hospital and UCD Clinical Professor, commented: "The formation of AIMS-RN is an exciting new venture that will promote and accelerate research into MS on the island of Ireland, enhancing our reputation for research excellence worldwide. AIMS-RN will provide coordinated information on developments in MS research nationally including the latest laboratory research outputs and novel technical advances.

"AIMS-RN is multi-disciplinary, cross-sectoral and cross-community, and will partner with global collaborators to ensure continued opportunities to participate in the latest bench-to-bedside studies to improve care for people living with MS and inspire, engage and train a new generation of clinical and academic researchers in Ireland."

Alexis Donnelly, has lived with progressive MS for nearly 30 years, and is excited by the formation of AIMS-RN: "This network will facilitate MS researchers throughout the island to cooperate across institutional and disciplinary boundaries, linking them not only with each other but with international colleagues and allowing fresh results and insights to flow back and forth. This can only accelerate the pace of research into progressive MS both nationally and internationally.

"I am reminded of the story of Professor Alan Thompson, Professor of Neurology in University College London and chair of the Scientific Steering Committee of the International Progressive MS Alliance (of which Alexis is also a member). Alan Thompson's interest in progressive MS was piqued initially by the discovery, in the basement of a Dublin Hospital, of an empty room labelled 'MS research'*. AIMS-

RN promises to replace that empty room with a vibrant community of MS researchers. It will hasten the day when no more people have to bear the burdens of progressive MS. Furthermore, I am just as impressed by the equal status that people with MS themselves will enjoy in that effort. Our own experiences and perspectives will enrich this initiative and the focus of its work.”

AIMS-RN Research Summer Scholarships

Coinciding with the launch, AIMS-RN is opening a call for budding multiple sclerosis researchers, at undergraduate or early postgraduate level, to apply for the first AIMS-RN Research Summer Scholarships. Following a generous donation from Eamonn Haughton and Declan Smith, of Chemical Systems Control (CSC), Ltd, the first scholarship will be awarded this year to a successful candidate who is considering an MS-focused research career.

“New therapies for MS will be built on state-of-the-art research. Funded junior researchers will spend time in research groups based in at least two of the participating organisations. It is hoped that the seeds sewn by this research will help to bring MS treatments to the next level.” Eamonn Haughton, CSC.

AIMS-RN’s aims, mission and ethos has been endorsed by the following organisations: MS Ireland, the UK MS Society, European MS Platform, Irish Institute for Clinical Neuroscience, Neuroscience Ireland, the Neurology Alliance of Ireland, the Dementia Research Network of Ireland, SFI-funded Research Centres Future Neuro and CÚRAM (the Centre for Research on Medical Devices), the Dublin Brain Bank, the Galway Neuroscience Centre, the UK Multiple Sclerosis and Parkinson’s Tissue Bank.

MS is a chronic, immune-mediated condition of the central nervous system (brain, spinal cord and optic nerve). In MS, myelin damage results in a range of symptoms including impairment of mobility and vision as well as cognitive difficulties and severe fatigue.

For further information and details of how to apply for the AIMS-RN Research Summer Scholarships visit www.aims-rn.org

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* Reference: Mayor, Susan. ‘Alan Thompson: Opening Doors for Patients with MS’. *The Lancet Neurology* 8, no. 3 (1 March 2009): 230. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1474-4422\(09\)70034-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1474-4422(09)70034-1).

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