



Meeting Report, March 2009, Athlone

Irish Association for Cancer Research Conference a Huge Success

The Irish Association for Cancer Research (IACR) Annual Conference took place this year in the Hodson Bay Hotel in Athlone on 5th and 6th March 2009. A record number of high quality abstract submissions (164) were received, reflecting the continued growth of the cancer research community in Ireland. Registration figures were over 250 and delegates came from all parts of the island of Ireland; this bodes well for the future contribution that Ireland can make to advancing our knowledge of cancer biology, cancer diagnosis and cancer therapy. This year we were fortunate to have Mr Rob Kenney, Executive Director of the European Association for Cancer Research (EACR) attending the meeting on behalf of the EACR. In an exciting development, the IACR will become part of the EACR, internationalising the connections and opportunities for cancer researchers on the island of Ireland.

A stimulating and thought provoking programme gave the opportunity to hear from a faculty of national and international experts in a number of exciting theme areas including **Obesity and Metabolism**, **Translating the Science**, **Stem Cell Biology**, **Cell Death Mechanisms** and **Inflammation and Tumour Biology**. Outlined below are some of the highlights of these sessions.

Prof Dario Alessi University of Dundee, UK, in his presentation entitled “*Disruption of the Highways of Cell Communication*”, outlined how our understanding of deregulated pathways that govern cell growth in cancer allows us to design new drugs to treat malignancy. Dr Samuel Sidi, Dana Farber Cancer Institute Boston USA, illustrated in his talk entitled “*Dissecting therapeutic pathways in vivo using Zebrafish: Chk1 targeting*” how employing relevant model systems can be used to develop novel inhibitors that can combat chemo/radioresistance in cancer cells, while Prof Max Wicha, University of Michigan Cancer Centre Ann Arbor Michigan, USA elegantly demonstrated in his presentation on “*Targeting Self Renewal pathways in Cancer Stem Cells*”, how our understanding and characterisation of cancer stem cells is providing new targets and new approaches for more effective cancer therapies. In the area of leukemia research, Prof Stuart Orkin, Dana Farber Cancer Institute Boston USA, provided some answers to the question of why patients with Down’s Syndrome have a higher risk of developing leukemia in his excellent presentation “*Developmental stage specific contributions to fetal hematopoiesis and leukemogenesis*”.

The Irish Cancer Society Lecture was delivered by Dr Joe Harford, Director of the Office of International Affairs, National Cancer Institute USA. In his thought provoking and enlightening presentation entitled “*The Role of Physicians and other Health Career Professionals in cancer Control*”, he outlined how we can battle this disease through cancer prevention initiatives

including smoking cessation, lifestyle changes and better lines of communication between healthcare providers and the patient. His talk stimulated a lively discussion in this highly relevant area.

In addition to the invited presentations, the IACR Annual Meeting provides an excellent opportunity for our doctoral students and postdoctoral fellows to present their work, either in oral or in poster form. The quality of presentations was extremely high and the international judging panel commented on the high standard, praising the work of the students and fellows. The following awards were made:

EACR Young Scientist Awards

Dr Darren O Connor, working in the laboratory of Prof Liam Gallagher (UCD)

Ms Andrea Valentine, working in the in laboratory of Dr Tracy Robson (QUB).

IACR/ICS awards (Oral)

Dr Anita Yakundi (Dr Tracy Robson, QUB)

Ms Kelly Redmond (Dr Dan Longley QUB)

IACR/ICS award (Oral/Poster)

Ms Simona Donatello (Dr Ann Hopkins, RCSI)

IACR/ICS awards (Poster)

Ms Elaina Maginn (Prof Mark Lawler, TCD)

Dr Marie McElroy (Dr Leone Young, RCSI)

Ms S McDade (Prof Dennis McCance, QUB)

Dr A Logan (Dr Dan Longley, QUB),

Ms Maria Prencipe (Dr Amanda McCann, UCD),

J Mulligan (Dr Richard Kennedy, Almac Diagnostics),

P Hyland (Prof Dennis McCance, QUB)

This conference would not have been possible without generous financial assistance from our many sponsors. In particular, we would like to extend our sincere thanks to the Irish Cancer Society (ICS) who continue to be a tremendous partner for IACR and provide strong advocacy for the research that IACR members conduct in Ireland. In addition, we are appreciative of the financial assistance provided by each of our “Gold” and “Silver” Level sponsors. This year Merck Serono sponsored a number of travel awards which permitted a significant number of junior researchers to attend the meeting and we are very grateful for their support in this regard.

Finally, the IACR Council is strongly committed to providing as many benefits and opportunities for all our Membership throughout the year. Recently, we ran a highly successful IACR Minisymposium as part of the 4th All Ireland Cancer Conference in Dublin in December (for details please visit www.ia-cr.ie) and we hope to develop other such initiatives in the near future.

Prof. Mark Lawler
President

Dr. David Waugh
Hon. Secretary

Dr. Sharon McKenna
Hon. Treasurer