

SpeakOut

The newsletter of Oracle Cancer Trust



Leading Research into Head and Neck Cancer

Spring 2015

Seeing is believing. How new robotic surgery trials hope to provide a leap forward for head and neck cancer surgery

One of the key attributes of a surgeon is to have steady hands and for head and neck surgeons this is of critical importance given the sensitive areas of the body in which they work. Now it has been announced that new robotic surgery techniques are to begin trials for head and neck cancer and this, says Oracle chairman and head and neck surgeon, Peter Rhys Evans, is a significant step forward, not least for eliminating hand tremor.

“One of the problems for a head and neck cancer surgeon is in trying to reach the back of the throat or the base of the tongue to see and operate on the tumour. Whilst we use magnifying glasses



Robotic surgery in action at The Royal Marsden Hospital. Primarily used for cancers such as prostate cancer, robotic surgery is increasingly being used to treat head and neck tumours, particularly cancer of the throat.

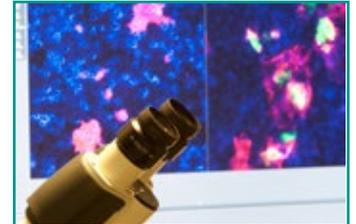
and excellent lighting, the ability to use a robot to access these difficult places will be of huge benefit to surgeons and patients alike“

The trial robot has two cameras and is able to produce a three-dimensional, 360 degree image of the tumour at huge magnification. For the surgeon this means a degree of accuracy that has simply not been possible before.

“Using the robot it will be possible to excise tumours with such accuracy that we can take a sufficient margin of cancer tissue which could mean a reduction in the radio or chemotherapy required after surgery. It is hoped that using a combination of tried and tested laser treatment to excise the tumour, as well as robotic surgery techniques, there will be a significant leap forward for the success of surgery in the treatment of head and neck cancer”

The multi-centre Pathos trial of robotic surgery began at the beginning of this year in the UK.

Oracle are also delighted to announce the newly established Karsten Schubert Head and Neck Robotic Surgery Research Fellowship which will fund research and training initiatives into robotic surgery in conjunction with centres of excellence around the World.



Oracle and The Institute of Cancer Research



Events & Fundraising Report



The Mark Donegan Fellowship



Last call for Endowment Funding

The Da Vinci robotic system takes surgery beyond the limits of the human hand and allows the surgeon to operate with enhanced vision, precision, dexterity and control

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Robot aids the search for a new tumour destroying virus

Researchers are used to complexity, it's what they're trained to do, but two scientists, who were carrying out a large scale project for Oracle, were grateful for the assistance of a robot when faced with carrying out a high throughput pharmacological test on a range of 80 different drugs, in combination with a cancer-killing virus. Researchers Victoria Roulstone and Joan Kyula are utilising the skills of a sophisticated Hamilton Microlab robot in this project, which is looking for novel drug combinations that could enhance the tumor killing properties of Reovirus.

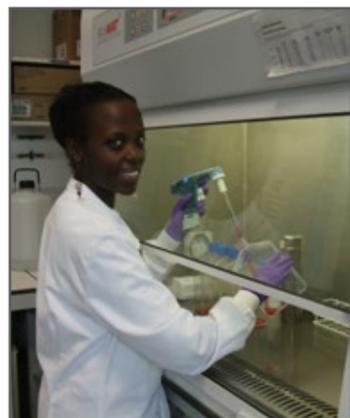


Hamilton Microlab robot testing samples

The Hamilton robot helps with the practical implementation of a complex test of this kind that is testing all the possible permutations of the 80 drugs with Reovirus. The robot was used specifically for the purpose of making the study quicker and easier and it is also able to remove human error, an almost inevitable result from a project of this complexity. The ICR has used the Hamilton robot on similar experiments where large quantities of drugs, in numerous combinations, need to be analysed and it is now fully optimised and programmed to be at the 'top of its game' in terms of accuracy.

Dr Joan Kyula explains:

"Reovirus has been shown to be sensitive in melanoma and some drugs from these experiments were shown to enhance the viral effect. We are currently looking to see how head and neck cancer cells can be further sensitised to the virus when we combine it with cancer drugs. By using the virus in combination with these proven cancer drugs, we are assessing which specific drug/virus combination will enhance cancer killing efficiently."



Oracle researcher Dr Joan Kyula

This six-month project is testing the drug/virus combinations in the laboratory. Clinical studies will follow and in later studies it is hoped to explore the mechanism by which the virus kills the cancer in the context of this combination.

This important project is being funded by The Mark Donegan Fellowship, which was established in memory of the late Mark Donegan, featured in this issue on page 7.

New trial promises to revolutionise head and neck radiotherapy

Finding new ways to improve the accuracy of head and neck cancer treatment so that healthy cells are protected is now at the forefront of research. As we reported in our Winter newsletter, work is due to start shortly using the new £10 million MR Linac machine on a pre-clinical head and neck cancer trial. The major benefit of the new technology is in providing the precision of MRI imaging at the same time as delivering radiotherapy treatment. This ensures that only cancer cells are targeted, protecting the healthy cells.

Professor Uwe Oelfke is leading this pioneering work, for which Oracle is funding two scientists to work on projects that promise to revolutionise head and neck radiotherapy. He is the new head of ICR and The Royal Marsden's joint department of Physics and is a specialist in targeting radiation at tumours with pinpoint accuracy. His work in three-dimensional tumour tracking has reached such accuracy that it can even take into account movements of a tumour induced by a patient breathing. Professor Oelfke explains: "Consequently radiotherapy patients will experience fewer side effects and have a better quality of life."



The MR Linac Accelerator



For the past ten years Oracle has forged an effective working partnership with The Institute of Cancer Research, London, one of the world's most influential cancer research organisations. Our partnership has resulted in a number of highly successful head and neck cancer research projects.

The Institute of Cancer Research (ICR), together with its clinical partner The Royal Marsden, is among the top four cancer centres in the world. It attracts the best scientists from over 50 countries and has an outstanding record of achievement dating back more than 100 years.

We talked to Thomas Bland, The ICR's Deputy Director of Development about the Oracle/ICR relationship:

"Without Oracle's support ICR would not be able to fund the proof-of-principle research which is so vital for the discovery of new treatments for head and neck cancer. Oracle's funding helps fill the gap that exists between a scientist or a head and neck cancer specialist seeing the need for a particular area of research and the point at which larger research funding bodies or pharmaceutical companies can get involved. Usually organisations funds are, by necessity, focused on larger-scale clinical trials but in order to reach this point the early stage research has to be completed – this is the fundamental work that Oracle funds."

"ICR's strategy is to embark on innovative research projects, from discovering new drugs and combination therapies, to uncovering new insights into the causes of cancer and how it becomes resistant to treatment, and novel ways to image tumours. This is where Oracle plays such an important role. With its particular focus and expertise on head and neck cancer it means that research projects for this cancer type are able to move forward when they might otherwise not get sufficient attention."

Thomas Bland told us that the partnership comes to the fore where research that is applicable to many different cancers receives funding from Oracle for a specific head and neck focus.

An excellent example of this is a gene therapy project that has been running for several years at The ICR. This is a promising new therapy that uses a modified virus to render cancers more sensitive to treatment. In a project part-funded by Oracle, Professor Caroline Springer and her team at The ICR have used an enzyme that lies dormant in the cancer cells until a non-toxic prodrug is administered that is activated only in cancer cells. The therapy offers a more targeted means of delivering treatment to the tumour – leaving healthy cells unaffected and is the first demonstration that the enzyme has a significant beneficial effect in head and neck cancer.



Oracle Researcher Dr Victoria Roulstone at the ICR

Professor Caroline Springer was part of the team that won the American Association of Cancer Research 2012 Team Science Award for their unrivalled track record in cancer drug discovery and development.

The Institute of Cancer Research is based in Chelsea, a few moments away from The Royal Marsden Hospital, and alongside the hospital in a second London site in Sutton.

Competition is fierce amongst graduate scientists to gain PhD Studentships at The ICR, with only 17 places awarded in 2014 from more than 550 applications.

For all our latest research projects visit www.oraclecancertrust.org/head-and-neck

Glory of Christmas 2014

Our ninth Glory of Christmas was arguably the best yet, with over 600 friends and supporters joining the whole Oracle team at St John's, Smith Square in London in early December. The Thames London Chamber Orchestra and the Choir of Christ's College Cambridge, with acclaimed guest Soprano Rhiannon Llewellyn, provided an evening of memorable music to start the festive season.

Guest readers Jonathan Aitken, Classic FM presenter Nicholas Owen and ex-patients Will Wells and Derek Young read a selection of festive poems. Derek Young delighted the audience recounting his personal battle overcoming throat cancer which left him unable to speak. With the support of therapists, he learned how to talk again and delivered a wonderful festive reading.

Chairman and Founder of Oracle, Peter Rhys Evans addressed supporters with the future plans for Oracle, including a separate major fundraising programme to re-instate a dedicated ward at The Royal Marsden Hospital for head and neck patients that incorporates a research unit. Just under £9,000 was raised from the concert including £1,800 on the night.

This year's Glory of Christmas will be held on Monday 7th December at our usual venue, St John's, Smith Square, London SW1.



Chairman and founder of Oracle Cancer Trust, Peter Rhys Evans addresses the audience of over 600



Award winning soprano Rhiannon Llewellyn



Concert readers (left to right): Jonathan Aitken, Derek Young, Nicholas Owen and Will Wells



The team of volunteers including staff from the head and neck unit at The Royal Marsden Hospital outside St John's, Smith Square



Volunteer concert organiser Nancy Sykes with Sarah Parfitt, Conductor Keith Marshall with Peter Rhys Evans



Top left: Karsten Schubert with singer Bryan Ferry
 Top right: Mandana Ruane with one of the four legged former residents of Room 225-6 at Claridges
 Centre left: Acclaimed artist Bridget Riley with Peter Rhys Evans
 Centre right: Karsten Schubert signing copies of his first novel
 Bottom left: Peter Rhys Evans and Right: Books on sale!

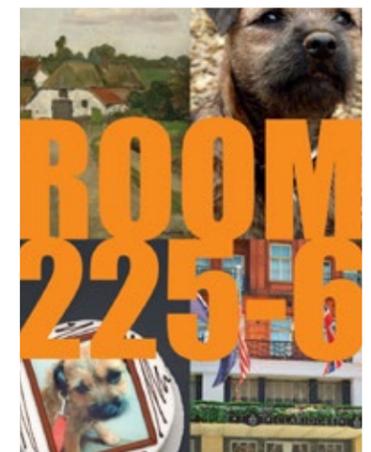
Karsten Schubert launches novel "Room 225-6"

Following major surgery, renowned art dealer Karsten Schubert headed to London's famous hotel Claridges to recuperate with the help of friends, including a border terrier! Room 225-6 was written as a result of his experiences and provides a fascinating and fantastical account of his recovery.

The book was launched in February at Claridges with over 300 friends and supporters attending. Karsten is generously donating all proceeds from sales of Room 225-6 to Oracle for the newly established Karsten Schubert Head and Neck Robotic Surgery Research Fellowship, which will fund advances in surgery for head and neck patients, using the new DaVinci robot at The Royal Marsden Hospital.

The Fellowship has raised over £47,000 to date and will fund key surgical research and training projects over the next three years.

Copies of Room 225-6 are available for £15 including p&p online at www.oraclecancertrust.org or call us on 020 7922 7924.



Coffee morning raises over £1,100



Supporter Pat Chalk first heard about Oracle and it's research work after a family member was diagnosed with tonsillar cancer in late 2013. Says Pat "As a family we wanted to raise funds for Oracle and with the support of friends we organised a craft fundraising day. Everyone got to work making preserves, baking cakes and making craft items to sell on the day. We were totally overwhelmed that we raised so much from the event, with donations even coming in from as far as the USA!"

And Pat has more plans for 2015 "After the success of our coffee morning in 2014, I am looking to organise another event and beat last year's record!"

If you would like to help raise funds for Oracle, please contact our volunteer fundraising co-ordinator Nicola Ridges-Jones nicola@oraclecancertrust.org or call us on 020 7922 7924.



Annual Golf Day, 25th June

Our Sixth annual golf day is once again being held at Burhill Golf Club near Walton on Thames in Surrey. We have exclusive use of the picturesque Old Course and have kept the price of a team at £550 for a fourball team which includes breakfast, lunch, auction and entertainment.

This year we are delighted to welcome ex-World champion snooker player John Parrott MBE as our guest speaker. As well as John's snooker fame, he is also an accomplished golfer, TV presenter, keen horse racing fan and well known on the speaking circuit.

If you are interested in taking a team you can book online at www.oraclecancertrust.org/events, or please email events@oraclecancertrust.org for full booking information.

Rugby World Cup Preview Party 16th September 7pm to late

Join Oracle for a sporting fundraiser with former England International stars of rugby Julian White MBE, George Chuter and former Samoan player Freddie Tuilagi, two days before England's first World Cup match. The evening will include interactive video clips, Q&A's with the former England International players as well as live entertainment from Paul Roberts, former lead singer of The Stranglers. Hosted by MC Roger Dakin, this fun packed evening is not to be missed.

Tables of ten are available for £900.00 and include a three course dinner and entertainment. The event is being held at Balls Brothers, Minster Exchange, Mincing Lane, London EC4. Tables can be booked online at www.oraclecancertrust.org/events or email events@oraclecancertrust.org for full booking information.



Annual Research Supporter Event September 22nd 5.30-7.30pm

Oracle would like to invite all supporters to join us at The Institute of Cancer Research in London to learn about some of the current research projects that are yielding some extremely promising results. Many of the Oracle funded research projects also form part of clinical drug trials with the Head and Neck Unit at The Royal Marsden Hospital.

The event will focus on current projects and give guests a chance to talk to the research teams as well as hear from the Oracle team of Peter Rhys Evans and Professors Kevin Harrington and Chris Nutting.

There is no charge to attend this event which is being held at The ICR, 237 Fulham Road, London SW3. Refreshments and a light buffet will be served. If you wish to attend, you must pre-register to attend which can be done online www.oraclecancertrust.org/events, email events@oraclecancertrust.org or call on 020 7922 7924. Numbers are strictly limited for the event so please apply early.



Established in 2014, The Mark Donegan Fellowship was set up in memory of Mark Donegan, pictured, the former CEO of investment company Altima Partners who sadly lost his battle with throat cancer in February 2014. The fellowship was set up to fund specific research projects under the guidance of Professor Kevin Harrington. As featured in this issue, the Fellowship is currently funding Dr Joan Kyula and Dr Victoria Roulstone's Reovirus project at The Institute of Cancer Research.

Over £300,000 has been raised by the Fellowship thanks to the extraordinary efforts of Mark's friends and colleagues undertaking formidable physical challenges to raise funds.



Says Mark's widow Deirdre: "When Mark was diagnosed with throat cancer he recognised the desperate lack of research funding for head and neck cancer. Shortly before Mark passed away a close friend, Fergus Beeley, established the Fellowship in memory of Mark to raise funds for this hugely underfunded area of research."

Professor Chris Nutting, who treated Mark said, "We are delighted that Mark's family, friends and colleagues have made such a huge effort to support Oracle's research into head and neck cancer. Funding from The Mark Donegan Fellowship will lead to advances in our understanding of head and neck cancer and the development of new treatments for patients."

Some recent fundraising achievements by the Fellowship include:

The Fan Dance Challenge

In January 2015 a team from Altima Partners took part in the Fan Dance Race, a gruelling march in the Brecon Beacons in memory of Mark. The race, used as part of the SAS selection process, involved a 24km hike up two sides of Pen Y Fan, an event that Mark had planned to complete in early 2014 as part of his recuperation, but had to pull out at the last minute due to his illness. Over £5,000 was raised from The Fan Dance challenge.

Photo: Altima CFO James Badcock at the summit of Pen-Y-Fan in Wales



"Upping the Andes" cyclists ride 8,000 miles unsupported from the southern tip of Patagonia to Columbia to raise £80,000!

Guthrie Fenton and friends Archie Innes, Tom Lawson and Toby Mackean are currently cycling the length of South America, a huge test of mental and physical endurance. Guthrie's chosen charity is The Mark Donegan Fellowship, which directly supports the research efforts of Oracle Cancer Trust.

At the time of writing, the team are heading north through Chile having cycled over 4000kms and are over a third of their journey north through South America. They have also raised a huge £40,000 of their £80,000 target. The team have a regular blog of their adventure on their dedicated website www.uppingtheandes.com. We will be covering more of the team's progress in our Summer issue and send the team lots of luck on their intrepid journey.



Heading to Mt. Fitzroy



The team reach the top of the Andes

Oracle's Professor Kevin Harrington featured on BBC's Panorama

BBC2's Panorama produced a dedicated feature on the innovative drug treatment programmes and a behind the scenes look at some of the research at The Institute of Cancer Research. "Can you cure my cancer?" gave a fascinating insight into the science behind the cancer drug development and featured several patients who were generous enough to share their experiences of being on a clinical drug trial at The Royal Marsden Hospital.

The Institute of Cancer Research, a key partner in clinical trials also featured in the programme and gave the BBC team unprecedented access over a two year period.

If you missed the programme, you can still view the episode online on BBC iPlayer.



Oracle Endowment Fund - final call for applications

In our last issue of Speak Out, CEO Anthony Sykes outlined a new fundraising initiative where supporters provide Oracle with a five year loan with the interest benefit funding Oracle's research projects.

The first round of funding for the scheme is planned to close in June 2015, and Trustees of Oracle Cancer Trust and investors have already committed £175,000 to this pioneering initiative, which will be invested in a fund managed by Sarasin and Partners.

If you would like to know more please contact Anthony Sykes by email anthony@oraclecancertrust.org or on 020 7922 7924.

Patient case studies

We are always keen to hear from patients who have been through head and neck cancer who would be happy to share their story to raise awareness and support other patients undergoing treatment. To get in touch, please contact sarah@oraclecancertrust.org



Donate and support Oracle's research work

Oracle rely on donations to continue its pioneering work in the field of research into head and neck cancer. Our work has resulted in improvements to patients lives following that can so often impair the vital senses of swallowing, taste and smell. The work undertaken by our team of research fellows under the guidance of Oracle's clinical team is recognised globally. Support our ongoing efforts by donating at www.justgiving.com/oraclecancertrust

Keeping in touch

If you would prefer to receive your newsletter via email please let us know by calling us on 020 7922 7924 or email to info@oraclecancertrust.org. We have been busy updating our supporter database so please get in touch if your details have changed or you no longer wish to receive communications from Oracle Cancer Trust.



Oracle Cancer Trust, 32-36 Loman Street, London SE1 0EH

Telephone: 020 7922 7924

Email: info@oraclecancertrust.org

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Leading Research into Head and Neck Cancer

