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Research team to examine cervical cancer treatments

■ Focus on awareness, screening and interventions

by **Aine Kerr**

A NEW cancer research team announced yesterday is to examine methods of detecting and treating cervical cancer.

Costing €1.25 million, the Cervical Screening Research Consortium (CERVIVA) aims to examine the disease from which 70 Irish people die every year. The figure represents one of the highest rates in Western Europe, according to the National Cancer Registry.

Exposure to Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) and lack of screening are the biggest factors for developing cervical cancer in Ireland, which has no free nationwide screening programme unlike many of its European counterparts. The Government has, however, undertaken to introduce the programme by 2008.

CERVIVA, which brings together researchers at seven academic institutions, eight hospitals and 10 commercial

companies, will work to raise awareness of screening, vaccinations and interventions.

The work of the group will centre on informing the public of issues and advances in the area of cervical screening, demonstrating the merits of different screening regimes and increasing awareness and support for research into diseases of the cervix.

The group will also be expected to develop "novel solutions" that will promote the early detection and effective intervention of diseases of the cervix.

Other responsibilities will include assessing 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.

The launch of the research consortium was welcomed by the Irish Cancer Society's chief executive Michael McCormack yesterday. He

said there had previously been no education campaigns for women on the importance of smear tests and the risks of HPV.

"We are seeing the rate of cervical cancer increasing in Ireland, while it has been decreasing in the UK where they have had a screening programme for 20 years," he said.

Professor John O'Leary, of Trinity College Dublin, Coombe Women's Hospital and St James' Hospital, said the research team would conduct "revolutionary research" and find ways for all women to have access to the best cervical screening procedures and the best treatment opportunities.

"We are also fully committed to ensuring that all women living in Ireland understand that exposure to HPV can cause cervical cancer," he said.

Recent research conducted by the Irish Cancer Society found that one in five Irish women have never had a cervical smear test.

