

# K2. Keynote Lecture II

## Building a world class environment for clinical research



*Dr Liam O'Toole*

*Chief Executive, UK Clinical Research Collaboration (UKCRC) &  
Interim Director, Office for Strategic Coordination of Health Research, UK*

The UKCRC is a partnership of organisations delivering a broad programme of work to transform the environment for clinical research in the UK with the aim of establishing the UK as a world leader in clinical research. Through coordinated working the UKCRC Partners are building up the infrastructure for clinical research in the National Health Service (NHS), developing an expert research workforce, streamlining the regulatory and governance environment, coordinating research funding and building incentives for research in the NHS. The Partnership includes the main UK funding bodies, academia, the NHS, regulators, industry and patients.

Before taking on his current role with the UKCRC, Dr O'Toole was the first Administrative Director of the National Cancer Research Institute (NCRI), which is a partnership of the main funders of cancer research in the UK. The NCRI has been instrumental in facilitating a number of high profile joint initiatives to enhance cancer research in the UK and is regarded as a successful and dynamic partnership organisation. This model of partnership working was used as a model for the establishment of the UKCRC. Prior to working with the UKCRC and NCRI, Dr O'Toole had 16 years' experience of research management in the public and charity sectors.

Since January 2007, Dr O'Toole has taken on an additional role as Interim Director of the Office for Strategic Coordination of Health Research (OSCHR). Based in Her Majesty's Treasury, OSCHR's main role is to work with the Department of Health and the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills to develop a single health research strategy for the UK.

The clinical research environment in the UK is currently undergoing a major period of change driven by a number of national initiatives designed to strengthen clinical research. This process of change has Government backing with high profile support from the Prime Minister Gordon Brown, particularly during his time as Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Recognising the need to realise the full research potential of a 'cradle to grave' healthcare system, the Government has committed major investment to build up the infrastructure needed in the National Health Service (NHS) to support high quality clinical research from the public, charity and commercial sectors. In parallel with this increased investment the major organisations that shape the clinical research environment in the UK are working together in a coordinated way to tackle the long-standing issues that had always been too difficult for any one organisation to solve alone. The establishment of the UK Clinical Research Collaboration (UKCRC) formalised this partnership approach bringing together the main UK research funders, academia, the NHS, regulators, industry and patients.

The UKCRC Partners have undertaken a joint agenda of work designed to re-engineer the research environment in the UK. This includes putting in place the infrastructure needed in the NHS to support high quality clinical trials; developing training and career structures for the many professions involved in clinical research; streamlining the regulatory and governance environment in the UK; coordinating clinical research funding and ensuring that the necessary incentives exist to ensure that research is at the core of delivering a National Health Service for the benefit of patients.

The Government funds health research in the UK through two main organisations - the Medical Research Council and the Department of Health's National Institute for Health Research. A wide ranging review of this structure for public funding of health research was recently carried out, resulting in the establishment of the Office for Strategic Coordination of Health Research (OSCHR). OSCHR's main role is to work with the Department of Health and the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills to develop a single health research strategy for the UK.

One of the first issues that OSCHR is tackling is the need to build up the UK's capacity to translate its high quality basic research into improved health and wealth of the nation. This focus on translational and applied research together with the development of single coordinated strategy for public health research should create the environment needed to drive innovative ideas from the laboratory through to the clinic.

What has characterised the last few years in this area is the degree to which diverse organisations are prepared to work together to implement real change. This often requires stakeholders to re-think their usual approaches and ways of working, but real progress has already been made and all involved have risen to the challenge of creating a vibrant health research environment in the UK.