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Cancer data initiative launched

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Britain's National Cancer Research Institute (NCRI) this week launched an initiative designed to bring a new degree of information exchange to cancer research.

In a [statement](#) published in the March 19 *Nature*, the NCRI outlined its vision for an international informatics platform that will allow access and analysis of data across disciplines from genomics to clinical trials.

"Our vision is to create a culture of data exchange to bring scientists together in a virtual community, where data can be shared in a format that everyone will understand," [Alex Markham](#), chief executive of Cancer Research UK and current chairman of the NCRI, said in a statement.

"At the moment, there's such a baffling array of data being generated that scientists simply can't keep up, and up to 80% of the available information is never finding its way into the public domain," Markham said.

The NCRI, established in 2001, is an umbrella group that includes the UK government, Cancer Research UK, the Medical Research Council, and the Wellcome Trust.

Its informatics vision is outlaid in its [Strategic Framework for the Development of Cancer Research Informatics in the UK](#).

"To me, this is the most exciting but most complex thing we've tackled," NCRI's Liam O'Toole told us. "To get there, lots of things need to happen... the communities need to get together and agree to a set of standards."

The agency is establishing a task force to implement the initiative, to be chaired by oncologist [Richard Begent](#). It has also set up an Informatics Coordination Unit to act as a point of contact and has a [Web site](#) to house details of future activities.

[Andrew von Eschenbach](#), director of the US National Cancer Institute (NCI), voiced his support for the initiative in a statement. "NCRI's initiative will complement our Cancer Bioinformatics Grid [CaBIG], which is being developed by NCI in partnership with NCI-supported cancer centers and private sector companies, as an open source, common standards research platform," he said.

"CaBIG and NCRI will play an essential role in accelerating our ability to eliminate suffering and death due to cancer," von Eschenbach said.

"If we just let things go on developing in a fragmented way, we'll be sitting around in 10 years saying, 'Isn't it a shame we can't link all this data together?'" O'Toole said.

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