

New Partnership between IARC and CRI to Spur Cancer Research in Thailand and across South-East Asia

Lyon, France, 19 April 2013 – The International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) and the Chulabhorn Research Institute, Thailand, today launched a three-year initiative to stimulate academic interchange and foster high-quality collaborative research into the causes of human cancer.

The new cooperative agreement was signed today in Lyon by IARC Director Dr Christopher Wild and Professor Dr Her Royal Highness Princess Chulabhorn Mahidol of Thailand. Her Royal Highness is the President of the Chulabhorn Research Institute (CRI), a leading biomedical, toxicological, and environmental health research institute located in Bangkok, Thailand. “The initiative marks an important new step in our collaboration to better understand and address the increasing cancer burden in Thailand and the South-East Asian region,” said Dr Wild.

Bringing together skills in epidemiology, laboratory sciences, and biostatistics, the joint research activities will focus on studying the role of environmental, lifestyle, and genetic risk factors associated with cancer.

“In countries undergoing fast socioeconomic development like Thailand, the prevalence of the risk factors, such as changes in diet, obesity, and smoking, is evolving and the combined effects of a transition in demographics and lifestyles has the potential to markedly increase the burden of cancer, with significant human, social, and financial costs,” explained Dr Wild. “Research to better understand the interplay between environmental exposure, lifestyle, and cancer is therefore vital to define and implement efficient cancer control strategies.”

Cancer is one of the leading causes of morbidity and mortality in South-East Asia, with an estimated 725 000 new cases and 500 000 cancer-related deaths in 2008 in the member countries of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) alone. According to IARC forecasts, cancer incidence in this region is set to increase by more than 70% in the next 20 years, simply because of population growth and ageing.

The objectives of the partnership between IARC and CRI are to enhance the scientific and technical capacity to design and implement joint research projects and to facilitate fellowship exchanges and state-of-the-art training in both epidemiology and molecular epidemiology. An innovative research topic of high priority to both organizations is the role of early-life exposures (dietary factors, chemical pollutants, or air pollution) on cancer and other health risks later in life.

The new agreement between IARC and CRI will build on the Agency’s existing research collaborations with a number of different institutes and organizations in Thailand, including the National Cancer Institute. Current topics include the role of human papillomavirus in cervical cancer as well as evaluations of the effectiveness of screening for colorectal and cervical cancer and early detection of breast cancer. In north-eastern Thailand, where infection with liver flukes is highly endemic, a research study is under way to look at epigenetic changes in bile duct cancer (cholangiocarcinoma). IARC also collaborates closely with Thailand to develop cancer registration across the country as a foundation for cancer control.

As part of the United Nations/WHO family, IARC collaborates with countries worldwide to combat the growing burden of cancer, particularly in low- and middle-income countries, where the largest increases in cancer incidence and mortality will occur over the next decades. Strategic partnerships with regional centres of excellence are key to IARC’s efforts to reduce the burden of cancer globally.

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The International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) is part of the World Health Organization. Its mission is to coordinate and conduct research on the causes of human cancer, the mechanisms of carcinogenesis, and to develop scientific strategies for cancer control. The Agency is involved in both epidemiological and laboratory research and disseminates scientific information through publications, meetings, courses, and fellowships. If you wish your name to be removed from our press release e-mailing list, please write to com@iarc.fr.