

Pancreatic Cancer Research Fund

Riding high for PCRF

Michael Gray from West London completed a mammoth 200-mile Paris to London cycle ride for PCRF – and did it nearly six feet off the ground on his Penny Farthing!

Michael (below) was part of a 15-strong team of European riders invited to take part in the event, organised by the Pickwick Bicycle Club – the oldest cycling club in the world. He raised over £2000 for PCRF in tribute to his mum Brenda, who had surgery last year following her diagnosis.

Michael's Penny Farthing is an 1888 reconditioned original. He knew both he and the bike were up to the distance, but says there are always a few challenges when he rides.

"When people ask me if it's dangerous, the answer is simply 'yes', he laughs. "The brakes are on the front wheel so there's a danger of going over the top if there's a sudden obstacle or I'm trying to control my speed down a hill.

And the 2cm wide wheels have solid rubber tyres with no tread, so I need to avoid any wet leaves on the ground!"

"The support along the route was fantastic – there's just something about Penny Farthings that people love!"



PCRF to wind down

This is a rather poignant newsletter for me as I'm afraid it will be the final issue.

It's time for me to retire, and after much thought, we have decided to wind the charity down. Please do read the cover letter sent with this newsletter, as it explains in more detail why we've arrived at this decision. The new research projects reported on P2 will be the last ones we fund, and from April 2024 we will no longer be accepting donations.

But it's not all sad news! We've been working closely with the charity Pancreatic Cancer UK, which I'm delighted to tell you is significantly increasing its spend on research. We'd love you to consider supporting them to continue the fight against pancreatic cancer – please see the back page for more information about this.

I know you'll have many questions, so please do read the cover letter or head to our website at www.pcrf.org.uk where there's more information. You are of course always welcome to email me (maggioblanks@pcrf.org.uk) or give me a call on 0208 360 1119 if you have specific questions.

We considered using this news as the main story on this page, but our supporters have **always** been front and centre, and I see no reason why this should change! We're so grateful for your support over the past 20 years in helping to achieve so much.

Maggie Blanks, PCRF Founder

UPDATE

Clinical trial of new drug compound

In the 2022 newsletter, we reported the exciting development that a drug whose early development was funded by PCRF at UCL by Professor Stephen Neidle (right) was heading towards a clinical trial. We're delighted to tell



you that the US regulatory body, the American Food and Drug Administration, has given the trials the green light to proceed. Patient recruitment has started in several centres across the USA and will follow in Europe.



Christmas cards

Sorry – there are no new designs this year. But last year's are offered at **HALF PRICE** (£1.90 per pack of 10). See our website or call on 020 8360 1119 for availability.

£1M for five projects starting in 2023

In total, your support has funded research worth nearly £20 million. This includes £15.6 million for 73 research projects, £1.6 million for the UroPanc clinical study and £2.4 million for the PCRF Tissue Bank.

Below are the final 5 new projects worth over £1M that started in 2023. Although officially retiring in April 2024, our CEO Maggie Blanks will continue to administer these 3-year projects through to completion and ensure the findings are published.



Dr Jun Ishihara, Imperial College London

Dr Ishihara has developed a unique new drug compound that can be used alongside immunotherapy drugs to target pancreatic cancer, activating specific immune cells called T-cells within the tumour. Tests on mice show that the new drug allows the immunotherapy to be more successful,

and with fewer side effects. He believes the drug has potential to be personalised to individual patients' tumours. This grant will allow him to develop this potential new treatment further.



Professor Michael Schmid, University of Liverpool

Pancreatic cancer often spreads to the liver and can take hold more easily because the immune system does not detect and kill the cancer cells. Professor Schmid has identified a protein that is found at unusually high levels in liver tumours of pancreatic cancer patients. In animal tests, blocking this protein

slowed the pace of the tumour's growth in the liver, so Prof Schmid aims to identify the best way to suppress this protein in pancreatic cancer patients to improve survival.



Professor Alan Parker, Cardiff University

'Oncolytic viruses' are viruses that are engineered to infect and kill cancer cells and have the potential to treat many different cancers, including pancreatic. Professor Parker will use the latest specialised methods to test a new oncolytic virus his team has engineered

to specifically infect pancreatic cancer cells. The infected cells are forced to produce anti-cancer medicines, attracting immune cells, and instructing them to recognise and destroy other cancer cells in the body.



Dr Kevin Litchfield, UCL Cancer Institute

Our immune system is primed to attack cancer cells as soon as they are detected. Dr Litchfield aims to develop a blood test which measures three different aspects of our body's immune response to early stage pancreatic cancer. He believes this new approach could produce results that are more accurate and

sensitive than other early detection tests currently being developed.



Professor Peter McCormick, University of Liverpool

Histamine is a natural compound released by special immune cells in our bodies in response to germs or bacteria that could cause disease. Professor McCormick will investigate the role of histamine in helping pancreatic cancer to grow. He will also

investigate whether antihistamine drugs, such as those that treat hay fever, could be repurposed as a new treatment for pancreatic cancer.

UPDATE

PCRF Tissue Bank

Cancer pathologist and researcher Professor Gareth Thomas (below) from the University of Southampton has been appointed as the new Chair of the Bank's Tissue Access Committee, which ensures that only the very best applications are granted access to samples from the Tissue Bank's precious resources.

Prof Thomas says: "The PCRF Tissue Bank does a fantastic job in supporting national and international research, and I have no doubt that we will see it contribute to some of the most important developments in tackling pancreatic cancer."

Currently over 10,500 samples of high quality anonymised tumour and normal tissue are stored in the Tissue Bank and available to researchers all over the world.

More than 2,500 people have donated samples and data. This includes 720 pancreatic cancer patients and a large number of healthy donors and donors with other pancreatic diseases, whose donations act as vital comparisons for many research projects. There are now over 62,000 separate portions of samples (known as aliquots) stored in the Tissue Bank, including tissue, urine, saliva and blood products such as plasma and serum.



UPDATE

Urine test clinical study back on track

The £1.6M UroPanc clinical study funded by PCRF, which is validating a urine test that can detect early-stage pancreatic cancer, is back on track after progress was stalled because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Study lead Professor Tatjana Crnogorac-Jurcevic (right) is confident that the study's original target of testing 2800 urine samples will be achieved by early 2025. These samples are being donated by patients suspected of having pancreatic cancer because of their symptoms (and referred to one of the study's three partner hospitals in London), and people who have a family history of the disease. Prof Crnogorac-Jurcevic is now also in discussions with San Raffaele Hospital in Milan – one of the biggest pancreatic cancer centres in Italy – to act as an additional sample collection centre and further boost sample numbers.



Marli turns trash into cash

Enterprising nine-year-old Marli Rubin (right) from Manchester raised £372 for PCRF by selling keyrings she made from shrinking empty crisp packets!

Marli decided to fundraise in tribute to her grandad (Poppa) Graham Rubin, who died from pancreatic cancer.

She explains: "We made 50 keyrings altogether and sold them at Poppa's work for £1 each, but everyone was really nice and paid more than that for them, and other people didn't take a keyring but gave us some money anyway," Marli says. "We were really happy that we made so much."



Musical milestone



Yasmin Bailey (left) and some of her team

Rock the Pav, the free annual music festival held at Broadstairs Pavilion in Kent, has topped £10K in its fundraising for PCRF!

The event showcases music performances from rock to blues and soul to funk and is attended by hundreds of music lovers.

Rock the Pav was founded by Broadstairs musician Phil Hunt and drummer Andy Burring, to fundraise and raise awareness of pancreatic cancer. Phil performed at the first two festivals before succumbing to the disease in 2019 and the event remains an ongoing tribute to him.

Yasmin Bailey who heads the Thanet fundraising for PCRF said: "It was an amazing show and people's generosity never ceases to amaze me."

And huge thanks also to Yasmin and her team of regional PCRF fundraisers who have their own fundraising milestone to celebrate, topping £60K since 2013!

Brothers' brutal run raises £80K

Riccardo (Ricc) Codacci-Pisanelli, and his brothers Matteo and Cosimo, raised over £80K for PCRF by running 100km along the Norfolk Coastal Path in memory of their mother, Sarah.

Sarah was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer in November 2022 and died just five weeks later, aged only 64.

"This was a brutal challenge for all three of us," Ricc said, "but we wanted to set a target that was sufficiently daunting but achievable and worth fighting for. None of us had run further than a marathon and in fact

every training session set a new distance record for me!"

The brothers set off at sunrise from Scratby and completed their epic run just before sunset on Branchester

beach near their parents' house. Around 40 friends and family were waiting with fish and chips and plenty of refreshments to celebrate, although Ricc said: "We were so shattered that within an hour we were all in bed!"

As for the astonishing fundraising total, Ricc said: "It's a real testament to how

much mum was loved. Our wish is that no other family has to go through what we went through – that at least they have more time and hope than we were afforded."



L-R brothers Teo, Cos and Ricc Codacci-Pisanelli

West Highland adventure

Friends Colin Matheson (70) and George Gorman (69) from Dundee completed the 96-mile West Highland Way, raising over £1000 for PCRF.

The 6-day trek was in memory of Colin's partner Elaine McIntosh and George's step mother May Gorman, who both died of pancreatic cancer.

After reaching the finish point at Fort William, Colin reported no injuries other than a big blister, whereas George's toenail had rubbed on his walking boots and fallen off. "That was a rather unexpected turn of events, but apparently is quite a common thing!" he says.

It was a great adventure," says Colin. "We met some lovely people and the scenery was spectacular. Some days were very hard going with the rough terrain and steep hills, but I'm really proud I did it and I think Elaine would have been proud that I did it in her name."



Colin Matheson (left) and George Gorman

A new era for pancreatic cancer research

With PCRF CEO Maggie Blanks retiring in April 2024 and the charity winding down, no new research will be funded by the charity and we are instead encouraging PCRF supporters to consider supporting Pancreatic Cancer UK.

Operationally, Maggie will continue to administer all 'live' PCRF-funded projects. This includes the five 2023 projects and the PCRF-funded UroPanc clinical study (see P2). Maggie will ensure that key milestones are met and findings are published and shared to the wider research community.

Maggie's administrative support will also include the National Pancreas Tissue Bank, funded by PCRF with an initial grant of £2.4 million. The Tissue Bank is increasingly delivering an invaluable contribution to research progress in pancreatic cancer (see P2) and PCRF has decided that the charity's reserves – any money left over once the live projects are fully paid for – will be used to support the Tissue Bank as it transitions towards its goal of becoming self-funding.

“We're so proud of what our supporters have achieved and what they've enabled us to do. We hope that they continue to fundraise for Pancreatic Cancer UK – who share our goal and commitment to save more lives – with the same determination and inventiveness that we've had the joy and privilege to witness over the past 20 years.”

MAGGIE BLANKS



Pancreatic Cancer UK CEO Diana Jupp (left) with PCRF CEO Maggie Blanks

We'd like to encourage you to consider fundraising for Pancreatic Cancer UK for the following reasons:

- By directing your enthusiasm, dedication and commitment for fundraising to Pancreatic Cancer UK, this will enable a greater programme of research to happen. This not only means more research, but also potentially more ambitious projects and opportunities that may not have been affordable to either charity on its own.
- Already funding academic and clinical research, Pancreatic Cancer UK has an excellent and comprehensive infrastructure in place, including an expert scientific advisory panel and a dedicated research management team.
- Pancreatic Cancer UK's new 5-year research strategy builds on the £12 million investment it has already made in groundbreaking research, with a commitment to increasing investment in research each year. Pancreatic Cancer UK will also lobby for more government money – at least £35 million each year – to be spent on pancreatic cancer research.

Through this new 5-year strategy, Pancreatic Cancer UK aims to transform how pancreatic cancer is detected and treated. Already, there has been investment of over £2.5 million in supporting early career pancreatic cancer researchers and the launch of a clinical trial in cutting-edge breath test technology for early detection. In addition, Pancreatic Cancer UK will soon be investing another £1 million into studies establishing how pancreatic cancer can be found at its earliest possible stage.

Diana Jupp, Pancreatic Cancer UK's CEO said: "Maggie has been a tour de force in the world of pancreatic cancer research for some 20 years, working tirelessly with PCRF's dedicated supporters to raise a phenomenal amount of money for this important cause. The research that PCRF has funded over its lifetime has been pioneering and leaves an ongoing legacy that Maggie and everyone should be incredibly proud of. There is still so much to do though, and I am delighted to be working closely with Maggie to ensure this legacy continues.

"At Pancreatic Cancer UK, we very much welcome any of the wonderful supporters of PCRF to join us, and continue funding research into pancreatic cancer. Our new and ambitious research strategy continues the work of both charities, and will ultimately transform pancreatic cancer survival rates and the future for people affected by this devastating disease. Thank you, Maggie, for all that you have done for pancreatic cancer research – we will continue the fight and wish you a very happy retirement!"