MOBILE TELECOMMUNICATIONS & HEALTH RESEARCH PROGRAMME

Press Release

RESEARCH INTO MOBILE PHONE BASE STATIONS ANNOUNCED

Funding has been announced today by the Mobile Telecommunications and Health Research Programme (MTHR) for two new projects:

- A volunteer study to investigate whether emissions from mobile phone base stations can elicit a variety of symptoms in those exposed to them. (University of Essex; Project Director: Professor Elaine Fox)
- A study to explore people's understanding of the uncertain risks associated with mobile phones and base stations. (University of Surrey; Project Director: Dr Julie Barnett)

The volunteer study at the University of Essex should help to address public concern about a range of symptoms experienced by some people when near base stations. This study will be the largest of its kind and should consequently be capable of delivering more definitive answers than previous studies in this area. The research team will be seeking to recruit volunteers to participate in the study. For those wishing to get involved contact details for the research team are available from the MTHR web site (www.mthr.org.uk).

The risk perception study at the University of Surrey will examine the effect of communicating uncertain risks on people's attitude and behaviour. The project is part funded by the Department of Health and will also evaluate the effectiveness of its leaflets on *Mobile Phones and Health* and *Mobile Phone Base Stations.*

Professor Lawrie Challis, Chairman of the MTHR Programme Management Committee, commented:

" I am very pleased that the MTHR programme is responding in this way to public concern about possible health effects from base stations. The first project should help identify the cause of the symptoms felt by a number of people who live near to base stations. The second, by exploring people's understanding of risk, should help in the development of more effective ways of explaining the possibility of adverse health effects from this technology."

Mobile Phones and Health, the report of the Stewart Committee, called for a programme of new research into possible health effects of mobile phone technologies supported equally by Government and Industry. This recommendation led directly to the setting up of the Mobile Telecommunications and Health Research Programme, which was allocated funds of £7.4 million. An international committee of experts, chaired by Professor Lawrie Challis, manages the Programme and allocates funding. The first fifteen projects funded by the programme were announced in January 2002, with funding for a further two projects announced in March 2003. In addition, the DTI and the Home Office have between them funded a further four projects as adjuncts to the Programme.

MORE

MTHR P/5
22 January 2004

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NOTES FOR EDITORS

The UK has in excess of 35,000 base stations, which are used to provide coverage for the 50 million mobile phones currently in use. With continual improvements and extensions to mobile phone services, these numbers look set to increase in the future.

At the request of the Minister for Public Health an independent committee, under the chairmanship of Sir William Stewart, was set up to report on Mobile Phones and Health. The report, published in May 2000 (available at http://www.iegmp.org.uk/), was the most comprehensive in the world and concluded that the balance of evidence indicated that exposure to mobile phone and base station emissions below current guideline levels did not adversely affect the health of the general population. The report did, however, recognise that there were gaps in current knowledge and that there may be biological effects as a result of exposures below guidelines.

Research already funded by the Mobile Telecommunications and Health Research Programme and currently underway includes:

- Two studies examining possible effects on blood pressure and brain function in volunteers.
- Three studies investigating whether the use of mobile phones can affect the risk of developing brain cancer or leukaemia by studying mobile phone users.
- One study investigating whether residence close to mobile phone base stations affects cancer incidence in young children.
- Two studies investigating the effects of mobile phone signals on a variety of symptoms reported by some users.
- Three studies examining the mechanisms by which mobile phone signals may be able to produce biological effects in model systems *in vivo* and *in vitro*.
- Four studies investigating the interaction of radio signals with the body in order to characterise how much energy is deposited and where.

Four projects funded by the MTHR Programme have now been completed and results have either been published or are currently being prepared for publication. These include:

- A study investigating ways in which hands-free mobile phones affect the performance of drivers.
- A study of the interaction of emissions from TETRA emergency services radios with the user's head
- A study to measure low frequency magnetic field emissions from mobile phones.
- A pilot study to investigate the feasibility of undertaking a cohort study of mobile phone users in order to assess the risks of a variety of brain cancers and neurodegenerative diseases.

Four further projects have been funded by either the DTI or the Home Office as adjuncts to the Programme:

- A study examining the electrical activity of the brain during and following exposure to signals from TETRA emergency services radios.
- Three further dosimetry studies, including an evaluation of the effect of hands free kits on absorption of mobile phone emissions and measurements of the emissions from microcell and picocell base stations.

Details of all the projects funded to date are published on the Programme web site (http://www.mthr.org.uk/). Reports on the progress of the Programme and findings from the studies will also be published on the web site as they become available.

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