

Director Appointed for New UK Health and Biomedical Informatics Research Institute



Professor Andrew Morris has been appointed Director of the new UK health and biomedical informatics research institute, which is to be named Health Data Research UK (HDR UK). The new institute will, for the first time in the world, incorporate on a national scale the whole breadth of data science research aimed at improving human health.

HDR UK is a joint investment led by the MRC, together with the health research departments of England, Scotland and Wales; the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC); the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC); British Heart Foundation; and Wellcome. Harnessing the power of the NHS and associated health and biomedical data in the UK, HDR UK will develop and apply the cutting edge informatics approaches needed to address the most pressing health research challenges facing patients and the public.

Professor Morris was chosen by expert and lay panels following an open international search led by the MRC. He is a world leader in the field whose research has advanced the use of health informatics in the UK and beyond.

The new director currently works at the University of Edinburgh (see Note to Editors), directs the Farr Institute's centre in Scotland and is Chief Scientist at the Scottish Government Health Directorates.

Professor Morris said: "The UK has world renowned data resources and research capabilities. As the volume and complexity of health data increases, there is an extraordinary opportunity to harness advances in mathematics, statistics and computer science to develop the medical science of tomorrow. HDR UK will enable us to remain at the forefront of this new field of health research by, for the first time anywhere in the world, incorporating the whole breadth of data science research from the laboratory to the clinic to the population, on a national scale.

"The Farr Institute and other informatics programmes have laid superb foundations in this area. The opportunity now is to find innovative ways of linking detailed epidemiological data with biological data at scale. This 'molecule to man approach' is imperative if we are to fully realise the UK's huge potential to solve the health challenges we face, to make new medicines, and to transform lives locally and globally."

HDR UK will build on the partners' long term investments in informatics skills, science and infrastructure. Over recent years, these have led to advances in many areas such as stratified and precision medicine, using genomic medicine to improve patient healthcare delivery, and in understanding how the environment affects public health. HDR UK will now bring together, into a single independent organisation harmonised under a single director's vision, the breadth of interdisciplinary skills, expertise and national and international partnerships needed to accelerate progress, analysing complex and diverse health related data at an unprecedented depth and scale.

HDR UK will also work closely with charities and the public as part of its commitment to public communication and engagement around the use of health related data. Developing NHS and industry partnerships that can work within trusted frameworks will be important in realising the opportunities to transform health and healthcare.

The Chair of HDR UK will be Dr Graham Spittle CBE, Vice-President IBM. Dr Spittle has been Interim Chair for the institute since July 2016.

Dr Spittle said: "I'm delighted that Professor Morris has accepted the position of Director following an open international search for an outstanding and visionary leader. The new institute will bring together leading edge health scientists and advanced analytics to revolutionise health research and delivery."

The MRC, together with the other partners, has made an initial commitment of £50m over five years. Additional funding is expected to be provided by new partners investing in specific projects.

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