

**Date: 12 July 2000**  
**For immediate release**

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

**GLOBAL HEALTH, CHANGING PERSPECTIVES**  
**Edinburgh International Conference Centre**  
**23 – 27 July 2000**

### **THE FIGHT AGAINST CANCER – WITH ASPIRIN, NUTS OR VEGETABLES?**

Population studies show that aspirin can greatly reduce the risk of bowel cancer. At the XIIIth International Congress of Dietetics, Edinburgh, 24-27 July, Professor John Burn of the Northern Genetics Service, Newcastle upon Tyne will suggest that salicylates, the active ingredient of aspirin, used to be a common component of plants, and so found their way into the human diet. Modern methods of food production have effectively removed all salicylates from our diet. Professor Burn comments “we are learning to fill the gap between what our body needs and what our normal modern diet can offer. It may be that the reason aspirin is so protective is that our green vegetables no longer contain the salicylates which once helped to protect those plants against infections. The current excitement about the Human Genome project should not lead us to forget that we are shaped by our environment and our genes were shaped by the environment, of our ancestors. Food is the most important determinant of survival. Prevention of spina bifida with folic acid supplements and prevention of bowel cancer with indigestible starches are two examples of dietary prevention in action.”

Dr Atif Awad and colleagues from the State University of New York, Buffalo, have examined the effect of phytosterols as anticancer dietary agents. Phytosterols in the diet have been shown to be protective against the development of colon cancer, breast cancer and prostate cancer. Phytosterols, as plant components, exist in high concentrations in some plant oils, legumes, sesame seeds and peanuts. In Dr Awad's studies, dietary phytosterols inhibited human breast cancer growth in mice.

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Dr Awad comments “phytosterols are successfully used in Europe to treat benign prostatic hyperplasia, a non-malignant condition common in older men over 50 years. They have been long recognised as hypocholesterolaemic agents by inhibiting the absorption of cholesterol from the gut. The studies I will present at the Congress address the other important function of phytosterols in our diet, namely, the protection from the second leading killer in developed countries, cancer.”

So, how does the Imperial Cancer Research Fund (ICRF) view the importance of diet in the prevention of cancer? They consider that dietary factors are estimated to be responsible for about 30 percent of cancers in Western countries. Dr Tim Key of the ICRF and based at the Radcliffe Infirmary, Oxford, summarises this into three relationships:

- a high intake of fruit and vegetables is thought to reduce the risk of several types of cancer, particularly cancers of the stomach, oesophagus and lung
- obesity increases the risk of some cancers, especially cancer of the endometrium (lining of the uterus), and breast cancer in postmenopausal women
- a high alcohol intake plays a small role in cancer of the mouth, throat and oesophagus as well as a small increase in the risk of breast cancer.

**Professor John Burn, speaking Tuesday 25 July 0830-1030 and Dr Tim Key, speaking Wednesday 26 July 1400-1700**

**Dr Atif Awad, speaking Wednesday 26 July, 1400-1700, State University of New York at Buffalo, Nutrition Programme**

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