Excellence in Women’s Health Research:

A Life-Course Approach

Background

The University of Aberdeen has pioneered the transformation of women’s health care for many decades. Professor Sir Dugald Baird, Regius Professor of Obstetrics and Gynaecology (1937-65), established Aberdeen’s international reputation in Obstetrics & Gynaecology (O&G) research by establishing the MRC Obstetric Medicine Unit, and later the MRC Medical Sociology Unit. These research units built on the distinctive features of the Grampian region: a stable population in a mixed urban and rural geographical region, and centralised clinical and laboratory services which allowed long term follow-up of women and their families.

Rather than treating pregnancy and birth as isolated episodes in a woman’s lifetime, Professor Baird recognised the influence of social factors during pregnancy on maternal and birth outcomes. He was an advocate for the use of routinely collected maternity data in answering key clinical questions, and building on this he initiated the Aberdeen Maternity and Neonatal Databank (AMND).

For over 60 years, a unique archive of information has been amassed by the AMND, which traces the health changes and challenges faced throughout the lives of women in the North-East: fertility, family planning, pregnancy complications, maternal health, pelvic floor and menstrual disorders, endometriosis, cervical screening, and postmenopausal health. These population-based observational studies, teamed with innovative methodological skills in randomised clinical trials, have allowed the Aberdeen’s Women Health Research Group to undertake clinical studies which have improved healthcare for women across the world.

Today

In June 2014, the Scottish Government announced an investment for new health facilities on the Foresterhill Health Campus in Aberdeen. The plans included a new hospital to replace the existing Aberdeen Maternity Hospital, with the inclusion of breast screening, breast surgery and gynaecology services, as well as another centre (The Anchor Centre) for out-patient and day-patient oncology and haematology services. Crucially, within the new building there will be extended provision and support for the ongoing work of AMND and the Aberdeen Women’s Health Research teams.

This new hospital will be called The Baird Family Hospital in recognition of the contribution made to women’s health by Professor Dugald Baird and the Baird family, in the North East of Scotland and across the world.

The Baird Family Hospital offers an exceptional opportunity to combine our life-course approach with multi-disciplinary collaborative research, embedded within a system that delivers innovative education and excellence healthcare in women’s health care.

What we will do

Despite medical advances in the last few decades, the framework for women’s health research in the UK and globally has remained dispersed.

Women’s health research and healthcare needs a holistic approach that encompasses women’s lives with a life-course approach; a view endorsed by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and Royal College of Obstetrics and Gynaecology (RCOG). The Chief Medical Officers of both Scotland and England have highlighted the importance of a proactive strategy for promoting women’s health at a national level.

With dedicated facilities within the new Baird Family Hospital, the Aberdeen’s Women Health Research Centre brings together clinical and non-clinical researchers alongside the clinical team to generate the answers to important questions in women’s health by research and evaluate its implementation into personalised clinical care. To expand our scope and collaborations, we will attract world-class academic clinicians to new key posts, each with a research team, supporting their programme of ground-breaking work. From the Women’s Health Research Centre, we deliver our exciting programme of investigation and exploration focused on those areas of healthcare practice with the potential to bring the greatest benefits to women and their families.

We will attract world-class academic clinicians to come to new key posts within Obstetrics and Gynaecology, each with a research team to support their programme of ground-breaking work. These new professors will lead the development of a focused Women’s Health Research Centre, undertaking an intensive programme of investigation and exploration focused on those areas of healthcare practice with the potential to bring the greatest benefits.

In contrast to many other Centres for Reproductive Health in the U.K., which have a primary emphasis on laboratory science, our focus will be population based research, with direct impact on clinical care - keeping women at the heart of the research at all times.

We aim to produce novel ways of designing clinical trials, predictive modelling, diagnostics, evidence synthesis and decision-support tools as well as the next generation of observational studies. Our world-class Research Centre will address women’s clinical needs at different stages of their lives, and identify the best ways to deliver effective and personalised care.

Research: To understand causes and long term consequences of common gynaecological conditions in women; use pregnancy as an opportunity for screening for diseases; evaluate the effectiveness and cost effectiveness of clinical interventions; and identify the best way of delivering person-centred care throughout a women’s lifetime.

Education: To train the next generation of world-class researchers in all disciplines in women’s health.

Culture: To provide a dynamic and supportive culture with close integration of clinical and scientific researchers and clinical staff at the centre of healthcare delivery and discovery.