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## PRESS RELEASE

### **£60,000 awarded to Bath research team to fund research into childhood arthritis and eye disease**

A Bath research team have received funding of £60,000 for research into childhood arthritis from the children's medical research charity Sparks.

Dr Ramanan, Consultant in Paediatric Rheumatology at the Royal National Hospital for Rheumatic Diseases NHS FT, also known as the Min, is leading the research which is looking into the diagnostic immune markers in Juvenile idiopathic arthritis (JIA), a type of childhood arthritis, and associated eye disease.

JIA is the most common rheumatic disease of childhood, affecting 1 in 1000 children in the UK, and can sometimes lead to sight threatening eye disease.

Dr Ramanan is working with Professor McHugh, also from the Min, and Dr Zoe Betteridge, from the Bath Institute for Rheumatic Diseases, on the research project which involves studying the blood samples from 330 boys and girls from across the UK and Ireland, who suffer with JIA and are aged between six months and 16yrs.

Dr Ramanan said

“We are delighted that Sparks have funded this important research. It is crucial that we learn more about this condition and understand how it behaves and what causes it to sometimes lead to eye disease.”

“It is important to point out that although eye disease can occur in children with JIA around two thirds of these will not develop eye disease, but for those who do the effects can have a significant impact on the rest of their lives.”

Using highly sensitive cutting edge technology called immunoprecipitation the research team are looking to see if there is something in the blood which will help to predict what leads to eye problems.

He went on to say

“We hope that our research will mean that we can identify these children sooner so we can help them by treating them earlier, in the hope that we can treat the disease better and better predict who is at risk.”

Whilst some research touches on this area, no other research has gone into this much detail.

Funding towards the research has been given an added boost thanks to the efforts of Ben Burford and his business partner Andy Thumwood who undertook the mammoth task of climbing Mount Kilimanjaro to raise £18,000 for the project.

Ben said

“We were determined to do our bit to support research into a devastating childhood condition like arthritis. Not many people really appreciate that there are 12,000

children in the UK living with arthritis, let alone that it can affect their eyesight. You tend to think of arthritis that only affects the middle aged and elderly, not kids.”

“It was hard work doing the training, but we made it. We were both determined to support Sparks and the project because we know how important both are.”

Mr and Mrs Grant have a four year old daughter who has JIA, she has three-monthly eye checks to ensure that she is not developing eye disease.

“Not only do you have to deal with the arthritis, there is also the lottery that our daughter may develop problems with her eyes, you worry about it every time we go for the check up. Any research that will help predict those children at risk is really important, as it could take out the unknown and these children will be able to get the treatment they need early.” said Dad.

Dr Ramanan went on to say

“Thanks to the funding from Sparks and the fundraising efforts of Ben and Andy we can come that bit closer to understanding JIA and identifying and providing early treatment for those children who may go on to develop further complications.”

The research project will end in Sept 2010.

ENDS

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#### Notes to editors

- The RNHRD NHS Foundation Trust is a national hospital specialising in complex rheumatology and rehabilitation. Services include
  - General and specialist rheumatology
  - Neuro rehabilitation
  - Chronic Pain management
  - Chronic Fatigue Syndrome/ME
  - [www.rnhrd.nhs.uk](http://www.rnhrd.nhs.uk)
- Bath Institute for Rheumatic Diseases [www.birdbath.org.uk](http://www.birdbath.org.uk)
- [www.sparks.org.uk](http://www.sparks.org.uk)