

Researchers investigate new ways to tackle bile duct cancer

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Experts at the University of Birmingham are working with counterparts at the University of Bristol and in Thailand to identify new ways of detecting and treating a form of bile duct cancer that is claiming more and more lives in the UK and across South-East Asia.

Incidences of intrahepatic cholangiocarcinoma (ICC) are happening more often, with patients facing low chances of surviving the disease using current treatments - this can be as low as five per cent survival rate 12 months after diagnosis.

University of Birmingham researchers Dr Padma-Sheela Jayaraman and Dr Simon Afford (pictured below) will work with counterparts at the University of Bristol and the Chulabhorn Research Institute Thailand. Their research will focus on how tumours develop under the disease, as well as the role played by specific proteins in slowing their growth.

ICC is prevalent in South-East Asia - including Thailand - mainly as a result of [liver](#) fluke infection. Funded by the Medical Research Council, the team's work investigates tumour development in [primary sclerosing cholangitis](#) (PSC), a [chronic liver disease](#) where [bile ducts](#) inside and outside the liver shrink.

The protein PRH/HHEX is essential for liver and bile duct formation. It is thought to play a role in suppressing tumours – malfunctioning at cellular level in liver, breast, and thyroid cancers.

Dr Jayaraman, Senior Lecturer in the Institute of Cancer Sciences – part of the Institute of Medical and Dental Sciences at the University of Birmingham, said: "This unique collaboration focuses on the identification of new mechanisms and new targets for treatment.

"The disease is usually advanced when patients are diagnosed with ICC, partly because there are no specific biomarkers that identify the cancer. We believe our research will determine whether PRH status is a relevant biomarker for ICC or for PSC progression towards ICC.

"Our research is possible thanks to the accessibility of primary tissues at the University of Birmingham, which allows basic research in cells to occur alongside studies that examine patient samples.

"Colleagues in Bristol and Thailand will conduct similar studies and we hope that pooling resources will lead to a rapid increase in knowledge in this area."

Provided by University of Birmingham

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