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Grant awarded £5,451 (1 Year)

***The role of diet in the aetiology of Crohn's disease and Ulcerative colitis
– A pilot study in a European prospective Cohort study***

The causes of Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis are unknown, although there is some preliminary evidence from two sources that diet may be important. Firstly the frequency of inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) has risen during this century, coinciding with major changes in the diet of the population. Secondly, special diets are used to treat patients with active Crohn's disease raising the possibility that the excluded foods may cause IBD.

To attempt to answer the question as to whether diet is important, several studies known as case-control studies, have been conducted. In these, the diets of patients with proven inflammatory bowel disease were compared with people without IBD. Although these projects provided some information, they had a major scientific flaw known as recall error. This is where patients have reported their current diet long after diagnosis, rather than the diet they were eating prior to becoming unwell and being diagnosed. The diets over the two periods may be completely different and it is most likely the latter, which could precipitate and cause the illness. This recall error means such case-control studies are very inaccurate.

To determine accurately the role of diet, a particular type of study called a cohort study is required. In such work, thousands of healthy people are asked to record their diet and are then followed up over many years. The diet of those who develop IBD can then be compared with those remaining well. Such a study is scientifically very strong because the dietary information is collected before people become unwell. Currently, no such cohort study has been conducted, although a unique opportunity now exists due to the setting up of the EPIC project. In EPIC, 400,000 people in 10 European countries have completed detailed questionnaires on their diet and are now being followed up.

This proposal is seeking funding for a pilot study in two of the European centres in the EPIC project in Britain (Norfolk) and Germany (Potsdam) each of which is monitoring 25,000 individuals. Funding would allow us to identify who has developed IBD since enrolling in EPIC, to obtain clinical details from physicians and to analyze the dietary data. Following completion of the pilot it could be expanded to include the other 8 countries in the EPIC project. Hopefully this will provide valuable data on diet in IBD possibly helping us to prevent the disease and introduce better dietary treatments.