

Donations of €5m lure children's cancer expert to Ireland to find cure in 15 years

■ Eithne Shortall



Wedding adviser Peter Kelly, held a fashion show to raise funds

AN American cancer expert is being paid €5m by a group of Irish campaigners to find a cure for neuroblastoma, the most common cancer in infancy and the cause of 15% of all childhood cancer deaths.

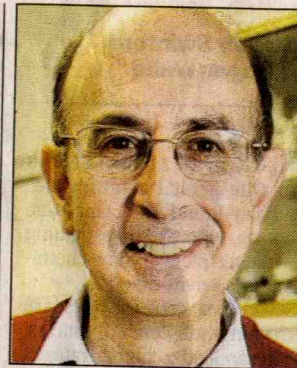
Raymond Stallings, who is moving from the University of Texas to Dublin to carry out the research, hopes to be able to cure the fatal tumours within 15 years. "I think that within 10 to 15 years cancer in all forms is going to be, if not completely curable, certainly manageable and almost never fatal," he said.

The €5m was raised by the Children's Medical and

Research Foundation (CMRF) at Crumlin children's hospital. Both companies and individuals made donations to the fund, and hundreds of people were involved in sponsored runs, fashion shows and auctions.

Stallings says he will use new discoveries in biology to target cancerous cells without harming healthy ones. He plans to identify a way of working out how neuroblastoma reacts to treatment, and to develop less abrasive drugs for treating the tumour.

"More often than not the children die of the tumour but they can also die from toxic treatments," Stallings said. "If we can tell how the tumour will respond to treatment, then we can adjust the drugs



Stallings: will be given €5m

given. If it responds well, we can give minimal amounts of toxic drugs.

"It's a very different process from making the cell so sick that it's going to die from the chemicals. If you do that, then all cells in your body are going to get sick and die."

The fundraising committee raised €250,000 through sponsored motorcycle drives across Ireland and America. Eoin Hassett, its chairman, said they were persuaded by Stallings' reputation and the importance of the work he will do.

"We're serious about having a positive effect on the life of sick children," Hassett said. "To think within 10 years you'd be able to make neuroblastoma completely manageable is just amazing."

The American National Institutes of Health has donated \$1m (€675,000) towards the project. Sarah Benson, communications executive of CMRF, said many businesses have pledged money and she hopes others will follow suit. "Fundraising can be difficult because people can't see the face of the child that the money will go to. But this research will really make a difference," she said.

Jimmy and Tara Brennan, owner of a clothes shop in Clonakilty, Co Cork have raised €21,000 for the research. They are planning to take part in a motorcycle run across America in September. "We did it because everybody has somebody connected with cancer and we have too, so

this research is very important," Tara said.

She also organised a charity fashion show and auction in Clonakilty, the events raising over €9,000 each. "Once we mentioned that it was for Our Lady's children's hospital and

cancer research, people came flocking," she said.

Neuroblastoma is a cancerous tumour that occurs in children under eight. It is most lethal in children under five, who account for 80% of cases. Crumlin children's

hospital deals with about 15 new cases every year.

Stallings has worked in Ireland before, moving here in 1995 to work as chief scientist of the National Centre for Medical Genetics which is also located at Crumlin.