

## Descended from Darwin

Patients can help doctors and nurses find new treatments at their own GP surgery. Research-active GP practice staff in Chesterfield are taking new inspiration from an old son of the town – Charles Darwin's grandfather, Erasmus.

With support from the Primary Care Research Network East Midlands & South Yorkshire, GPs at the Wheatbridge Health Village have set up a research institute so patients can volunteer for studies. The first studies taken up have been looking at swine flu, lung fibrosis and preventing eczema in babies. The doctors and nurses hope that offering chances nearer to home will inspire people to help find new treatments and tests.

Erasmus Darwin, educated in Chesterfield, was a physician, inventor and founder of a school. He never found the fame of his illustrious grandson, Charles, but he did work in new ways to try to help the people in the "Midlands Enlightenment". Two hundred and fifty years on, doctors and nurses are asking Chesterfield patients to shed some light on more modern diseases.

The research institute's lead GP, Dr Mark Loveland, said, "The Wheatbridge Health Village has brought together two Chesterfield GP surgeries. This is along with dental patients, a sexual health clinic, and pharmacy and now a research institute. We'll be offering people a chance to join in important studies on causes and treatment of disease. We'll be working with the local NHS, charities and researchers from all over the UK. Like giving blood or hospital voluntary work, this is a way to give something back. As a GP, it also means more time to learn more about our patients and their health problems."

Funding comes from Trent Comprehensive Local Research Network via NHS Derbyshire County, along with the medical research charities and local universities. This allows research to be an additional service, not something that takes staff away from patient care, and the institute has employed a dedicated research nurse to support people who want to volunteer. There are research appointments, telephone consultations, letters and a website for people who want to find out more. In the evolution of health research like this institute, Erasmus Darwin is an inspiration to those who follow.

Read more at [www.wheatbridge.org.uk](http://www.wheatbridge.org.uk).