**Middle aged diabetes patients can die six years earlier**

**Issued: Thu, 03 Mar 2011 09:36:00 GMT**

Having diabetes in mid-life may reduce a person’s life expectancy by an average of six years, according to a large multinational study published today.

Co-author Professor Naveed Sattar of the University's College of Medical, Veterinary and Life Sciences, said the findings show that people with type 2 diabetes are at greater risk of dying from several other diseases, including cancer and infection.

Diabetes is already known to approximately double the risk of heart attacks and strokes.

The findings highlight the importance of preventing diabetes, which affects more than 2.5 million people in the UK and nearly 285 million people worldwide.

Published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, scientists from the Emerging Risk Factors Collaboration - coordinated by the University of Cambridge - analysed data on 820,900 people, each of whom was monitored for around a decade.

Even after accounting for other major risk factors such as age, sex, obesity and smoking, the researchers found that people with diabetes are at increased risk of death from several common cancers, infections, mental disorders, and liver, digestive, kidney and lung diseases.

Prof Sattar said: "The findings of this paper not only show the extensive range of complications linked to diabetes, but also the importance of raised sugar levels, as opposed to cholesterol and blood pressure to such complications.

"Overall, the findings should help incentivise diabetes prevention in those at high risk.

There is also some good news here.

We show that a halving of the risk of death in patients with diabetes compared to those without, over the last four decades, is a trend almost certainly linked to better treatments in diabetes patients."

About 60 per cent of the reduced life expectancy in people with diabetes is attributable to blood vessel diseases, such as heart attacks and strokes, with the remainder attributable to these other conditions.

Only a small part of these associations are explained by obesity, blood pressure or high levels of fat in the blood – conditions which often co-exist with diabetes.

The study was funded by the Medical Research Council, British Heart Foundation and Pfizer.

Prof Stephen Holgate, chair of the MRC Population and Systems Medicine Board, said: “Preventing diabetes becomes that much easier when we have a complete picture of the debilitating effect it has across the body and we know what steps to take to mitigate the damage.

This is an excellent example of MRC funded research that builds on our understanding of life expectancy and the factors that influence wellbeing and ageing.”

The collaborative study, which involved over 250 scientists from 25 countries, also suggests that people with diabetes may be at increased risk of death from intentional self-harm - a finding which the scientists say requires further study, including investigation of the possible link between diabetes and depression.