

Wednesday, 6 September 2023

## Freddie Bray

### Category 2: Civil society

### Impact

Dr Freddie Bray, PhD, is Head of the Cancer Surveillance Branch (CSU) at the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC). His areas of research revolve around the estimation of the global cancer burden, the analysis of time trends and predictions of the future scale of cancer globally, linked to human development transitions.

In support of the crucial need for high quality cancer surveillance systems, Dr Bray leads the Global Initiative for Cancer Registration (GICR), an international multi-partner programme designed to ensure a sustainable expansion of the coverage and quality of population-based cancer registries (PBCR) in low-and middle income countries (LMIC). PBCR are the eyes and ears of cancer control. CSU bears the primary responsibility for collecting and curating the world's cancer data. This is an immense public service, which CSU is uniquely positioned to carry out for the world's benefit, and without which evidence-informed global cancer control would simply not be possible. Established within the framework of the GICR, there are six IARC Regional Hubs and three IARC-GICR Centres of Excellence, including three recently opened in Kenya, South Africa, and Côte d'Ivoire to support registry capacity building in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Dr Bray is increasingly engaged in assessing and advocating the long-term public health benefits of interventions across the cancer continuum. He has predicted the future burden under specific scenarios of status quo vs. effective cancer control to assess whether global targets such as SDG3.4 will be achieved for cancer. For the betterment of implementation of cancer actions globally, Dr Bray gives a strong endorsement to increased coordination and collaboration with international organizations, including joint actions with the World Health Organization (WHO), particularly in support of the development of effective policies on data and surveillance to save lives, aligning IARC's GICR with the three signature initiatives of WHO.

### Equity

Cancer is among the greatest public health problems faced by the world's nations in the 21st century. Although the availability of robust mortality data is associated with improved population health outcomes, many LMIC have weak vital statistics systems, re-emphasising the need for PBCR as providers of both cancer incidence and survival statistics. PBCR are, therefore, a crucial resource for policymakers, providing the evidence base from which to plan, monitor, and assess the effectiveness of national cancer control programmes.

Dr Bray believes putting data at the heart of policy is key to saving lives, and a means to narrow the present cancer inequity gap. Having presided over the development of the “GLOBOCAN” estimates of the global burden for many years (<http://gco.iarc.fr> - 2022 estimates available October 2023), Dr Bray is keen to point out that such estimates are mainly based on such locally-produced data, and that it is important to build capacity and infrastructure for data production, analysis, and interpretation within the countries themselves to inform local planning. The knowledge that estimates are derived from surveillance systems like PBCR is often a powerful incentive for governments to invest in capacity to record routine cancer data in local settings.

Dr Bray is an advocate for the cause of cancer registration, particularly in LMIC where the data gap is greatest, including the prioritisation of “counting cancers” among the many demands on limited health care services, and the provision of resources for the training and career development of PBCR staff themselves, who often work under the most demanding of circumstances, hidden from sight. Dr Bray believes the GICR apparatus has created a global environment whereby technical and funding organizations can work cooperatively to improve the quality of cancer data via training, advocacy, data collection and analysis, translating data to effective policy on the ground.

## Global recognition

Dr Bray was the first to examine the scale and profile of cancer worldwide using the Human Development Index (1), and report the increasing importance of cancer as a leading cause of premature death in the 21st century (2). The global burden papers showcasing the GLOBOCAN estimates for 2018 and 2020 received enough citations (circa June 2021) to place them in the top 0.1% of papers published in the past two years in the field of clinical medicine. During the first three years of the Global Cancer Observatory - #since its inception in September 2018, it has been visited over five million times.

These accolades truly represent a global team effort, and Dr Bray is proud to report these and the fact that that no personal awards have been forthcoming during his near-30-year career. Indeed, Dr Bray last won an award in 1994 for his summer dissertation as part of his Masters in Medical Statistics at Leicester University in 1994. There were joint winners that year, so the £100 Glaxo Project Prize was shared with another of the 16 students in the class.