

Editorial

The 4th EORTC Breast Cancer Working Conference, London, 1-3 July 1987

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THE 4th EORTC Breast Cancer Working Conference was held at Imperial College, London from 1 to 3 July 1987. There were 674 participants from 32 countries. The format of the conference followed the successful one adopted at the 3rd Conference in Amsterdam in 1983. The topics selected for discussion were cellular aspects, epidemiology and prevention, imaging techniques, screening, early disease and advanced disease. On the first day, review lectures were given on these topics and ample time was devoted to the 340 posters presenting data from proffered papers. There was also a poster display describing 14 recent studies of the EORTC Breast Cancer Co-operative Group. On the second day, workshops were held on the selected topics and, on the third day, rapporteurs presented to plenary sessions the reports on the workshops and panel discussions were held.

In this issue of the *European Journal of Cancer and Clinical Oncology*, we present the review lectures and workshop reports. Professor M. Tubiana delivered the first lecture in memory of Dr Jean-Claude Heuson, the Group's first chairman, and we are pleased to include it. An overview of the activities of the EORTC Breast Cancer Co-operative Group has been prepared by the Secretary, Dr J. Wildiers.

Several major developments in the field of breast cancer since the 3rd Working Conference in 1983 were recognized and discussed at the Conference. As the functions of various oncogenes are gradually being identified, it was interesting to learn that oncogene expression may correlate with the

morphology of breast cancer. Information associating oestrogens with the pathogenesis of breast cancer and how this might be exploited in the prevention of this disease was an important subject of debate at the conference. Methods for imaging the breast and metastatic disease were considered carefully together with special attention to the most appropriate use of them in routine practice. There was optimism that new developments such as immunolocalization and magnetic resonance imaging could make significant contributions in due course. The prospect that magnetic resonance spectroscopy could enable the analysis of biochemical processes *in vivo* by a non-invasive technique is particularly attractive. The update of screening projects showed clear benefit from this approach and nationwide screening programmes soon will be adopted in several countries. In early disease, treatment policies allowing breast preservation are being increasingly adopted. The importance of optimal local control and its impact on survival was emphasized several times at the Conference. General agreement has been reached that some form of adjuvant systemic treatment is indicated in the routine management of both pre and post menopausal patients with involved axillary lymph nodes. There is still uncertainty over the precise mechanism of action of adjuvant chemotherapy and it seems likely that this is, at least in part, mediated by ovarian suppression. For the treatment of metastatic breast cancer, the development of pure aromatase inhibitors and anti-osteoclastic agents such as diphosphonates is likely to improve

our ability to palliate this stage of the disease.

We now look forward to the 5th EORTC Breast Cancer Working Conference which is to be held in Leuven in 1991 when we expect that further advances in our understanding of this disease and our ability to control it will be recognized.

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