

Education and Training in Oncology

THE IDEA behind this new section of EJC is new only to Europe. In fact, the readers of *JAMA* (the *Journal of the American Medical Association*) have been familiar for many years with a special issue appearing each January and July, dedicated to the Continuing Medical Education (CME) programmes. The concept of Continuing Medical Education is a very important one because it recognises that medical knowledge very rapidly becomes obsolete and that to be a good doctor requires that one constantly updates this knowledge. To their great credit, the Americans addressed this issue several years ago and have tried to solve the problem with regular controls and incentives. The professional skills of medical doctors are periodically checked in the United States and in addition they have to be very careful to avoid the allegation of "malpractice", a widely used term which often refers to the incapacity to offer the best possible treatment. On the other hand, the system has introduced fiscal incentives to encourage updating and continuing education: courses, meetings and congresses are rated on the basis of their educational content and given a score which corresponds to different levels of tax deductibility of the various costs (travel, registration fees, purchase of books, etc.).

Obviously, there are also limits and weaknesses in the American system, and we are glad to have a paper on this topic in this issue; however, we believe that a partial solution is better than no solution at all and many medical professionals in Europe feel that it is now time to address the issue. A system like the American one is obviously unthinkable for Europe at present, and also for the European Community, where too many differences exist in the approach to the problem of medical education and in the fiscal regulations of the 12 Member States. But movement is occurring and it is not by chance that this happens in the oncological world: cancer medicine is particularly complex and rapidly evolving, thus requiring a continuing updating effort.

After 10 years of activity, the European School of Oncology has shown that there is a great need in Europe for intensive and scientifically independent training programmes, far from the large congresses where different speakers offer overlapping and often controversial presentations without any educational purpose. In Europe there is now a growing population of health professionals looking for high level educational and training opportunities: young oncologists, specialists in disciplines other than oncology but keen to know more about cancer, general

practitioners wishing to improve their skills in tumour management, nurses involved in special fields like clinical trials and palliative care, data managers helping doctors in cancer research, product managers in pharmaceutical companies, biologists and technicians.

Luckily, there is also an increasing range of such opportunities on offer from cancer centres, scientific societies, national and international schools and we felt that this was the time to collect as much information as possible on this topic and to offer it periodically to a larger readership.

But the aim of Education and Training in Oncology (ETO) is a little more ambitious. Starting as a section of the *European Journal of Cancer*, it will appear twice a year and offer information not only on courses suitable for international participation, but also on fellowships available, awards for scientific achievements, positions available in Europe for oncologists and cancer related disciplines. Additionally, we will stimulate the publication of papers on the different aspects of education in medicine, including new methodologies and technologies.

We do not, of course, feel entitled to give any rating or scores to the various educational events as the European School of Oncology has no formal status to do so. However, the reader can be assured that we will do our best to select what we believe to be the most effective meetings from the educational point of view and the journal will be assisted in this by the Scientific Committee of the School and its network all over Europe. Letters and suggestions from the readers will be welcome and will be published whenever possible. Advertisements will be clearly identified as such and the journal will have no responsibility for their content, although control and a degree of selection will be exerted in this part.

The European School of Oncology hopes to have started through the EJC a new positive and constructive contribution to the improvement of cancer education and training in Europe and is indebted to all the librarians, course organisers, lecturers and faculty members who will give their support to this important new initiative and help to make it known.

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