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Book Review

Cancer in Italy. Incidence Data from Cancer Registries, 1983–1987

Edited by R. Zanetti and P. Crosignani. Torino, Lega Italiana per la Lotta Contro i Tumori. Associazione Italiana di Epidemiologia, 1992.

Cancer in Italy: Incidence Data from Cancer Registries, 1983–1987 represents a compromise between the two most popular ways of disseminating incidence data, i.e. "Cancer Incidence in Five Continents" edited every 5 years by the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) and the local publication of individual Registries. Many reasons may have prompted the organisers of nine all-cancer-site registration schemes (i.e. six in North Italy, two in Central Italy and one in South Italy) in addition to two partial schemes (i.e. colorectal cancer and childhood neoplasms) to conceive such a publication.

The most notable is probably the need to summarise the impressive, although somewhat delayed (in respect to northern Europe) development of epidemiological research in Italy in the past 15 years or so. The number and the quality of Italian cancer registries emerge very well from the bulk of data presented and the richness of the comparisons and considerations on cancer trends and aetiology included in *Cancer in Italy*. In fact, in addition to many orthodox tables and figures, every cancer site is dealt with in detail in order to help the reader to link the picture which emerges from descriptive epidemiology to the present knowledge and hypotheses on cancer causation.

The second reason for this publication is related to the ways in which cancer registries have developed in Italy. In the absence

of central planning, registries were born from the local initiative of a few epidemiologists, clinicians and pathologists. Therefore, as Max Parkin from IARC states in his opening remarks, "The task of producing a national synthesis is in Italy much greater than in compendia of results from registry networks in which pre-existing standardisation results from the explicit goal of unified analysis and publication (e.g. SEER-surveillance, epidemiology and end results, in the U.S.A.)". But also, I would add, more urgent. For good reason, aside from a very Italian emphasis on historical and political aspects of the growth of epidemiological research in Italy, the authors repeatedly state that this volume is part of a more general effort to improve data collection and epidemiological training.

I think also that *Cancer in Italy* constitutes useful reading for epidemiologists elsewhere. Indeed, Italy is an interesting "natural experiment" and still shows, in the period examined (i.e. mid-1980s), very substantial variations in the incidence of most individual cancer sites. The 2.4 ratio between the highest-incidence and the lowest-incidence area for cancer of the stomach and the almost 4-fold ratio for cancer of the oral cavity are examples of important opportunities of aetiological research.

Last, but not least, *Cancer in Italy* is entirely bilingual (Italian and English) and can be obtained for free by writing to Dr Zanetti (Registro dei Tumori per il Piemonte e la Valle D'Aosta, Unità di Epidemiologia, Dipartimento di Oncologia, Ospedale S. Giovanni Antica Sede, Via S. Francesco da Paola 31, 10123 Torino, Italy) or Dr Crosignani (Registro Tumori Lombardia—Provincia di Varese, Istituto Nazionale per lo Studio e la Cura dei Tumori, Via Venezian 1, 20133 Milano, Italy).

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