

The Perugia International Cancer Conference III

Introduction

IN RECENT years significant advances have been made in the treatment of malignant disease with cytotoxic drugs, but many side-effects of chemotherapy still bear a heavy cost for patients. This often jeopardises the potential results of treatment and also the patients' quality of life.

For example, infectious complications of chemotherapy-induced neutropenia are amongst the worst side-effects of cancer treatment. New antibiotics and new strategies in the prevention of such complications have recently been introduced. Also, the availability of haemopoietic growth factors has made a significant difference, especially in the setting of autologous bone marrow transplantation.

Nausea and vomiting are rated among the most distressing side-effects related to cancer therapy. The results obtained in the past 10 years in antiemetic therapy with a combination of high-dose metoclopramide and steroids have been impressive, but a proportion of patients (approximately 30–40%) still suffer from nausea and vomiting, and a few present troublesome extrapyramidal reactions because of the metoclopramide. The recent introduction of new agents such as the 5-hydroxytryptamine receptor antagonists has provided a new possibility of improving such results in terms of efficacy and toxicity.

Recently, a new emphasis has been placed on the quality of life of cancer patients, and on the difficulties of an objective and reproducible way of measuring this, so that the outcome of different modalities of treatment could be compared.

Taking all this into consideration, the area of cancer supportive therapy was a natural choice to make as the topic of the *Third Perugia International Cancer Conference*. Again, as in previous conferences, we were fortunate to have in Perugia some of the most experienced and well-known researchers in this field.

The new aspects of antibiotic therapy in cancer patients were presented by A. Del Favero and J. Klastersky who focused on antibacterial prophylaxis with the new fluorinated quinolones, and on the value of empirical antibiotic therapy. Antiemetic therapy probably provided the highlight of the conference due to the number of speakers and the interest surrounding the new drugs. After a presentation by P.L.R. Andrews on the mechanism of action of the 5-hydroxytryptamine receptor antagonists, the various drugs now available were presented in detail on the basis of the phase II studies performed so far. At the end of the antiemetic session all speakers participated in a very stimulating round-table discussion, moderated by R.J. Gralla, on the perspectives of antiemetic therapy and future research. The topic and the presence of so many authorities in the field made this a unique event for those interested in this field.

Finally, quality of life studies relating to therapy for lung and breast cancer were presented by R.J. Gralla and B. Meyerowitz, respectively.

As the Chairman of the conference, I was very proud to have brought together so many distinguished oncologists, who shared their experiences with us and who made it possible to foresee consistently improving results in the application of well-defined and rigorously evaluated supportive therapy for cancer patients during the next decade.

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