Pergamon

European Journal of Cancer Vol. 31A, No. 4, p. 427, 1995
Elsevier Science Ltd
Printed in Great Britain

0959-8049(95)00041-0

Preface

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NEUROBLASTOMA IS the second most common tumour in young children. It often takes a progressive clinical course, and while many advances have been made towards the understanding of the genesis and biology of this tumour, little improvement in the survival rate has been achieved over the past few years.

Neuroblastoma is a fascinating tumour, characterised by unique clinical and biological qualities. The high rate of spontaneous regression seen in stage 4S tumours, combined with the observation that differentiation can be induced by various agents *in vitro*, may be an indicator for the relative instability of the tumorigenic phenotype of the cell. One can only speculate whether genetic alterations, which in neuroblastoma cells predominantly appear in chromosome 1p and as amplification of *MYCN*, have a role in stabilising the tumorigenic behaviour. Consequently, central themes for future clinical and basic research may address the principle mechanisms that evoke the sustained malignant growth of neuroblastic cells. Only understanding why tumour cells behave as they do will eventually allow the design of new therapeutic strategies that may entail better survival rates.

The peer reviewed papers included in this Special Issue, illustrate some of the most up-to-date areas of research, and include novel therapies, alongside data on molecular and cellular mechanisms for neuroblastoma. This volume, therefore, covers a wide spectrum of research interests for both the clinician and scientist. It reflects just how rapidly knowledge on neuroblastoma has grown, and how some of this knowledge may come to be applied. We trust that the juxtaposition of these papers will help to stimulate new and even more productive research into the mystery of neuroblastoma, which will be translated into improvements in clinical outcome.

Some of the data published here were initially presented at the first European Symposium on "Neuroblastoma: Recent Advances in Genetic, Clinical and Cellular Analysis", jointly organised by the European Neuroblastoma Basic Science Group (EURONEU) and the European Neuroblastoma Study Group (ENSG), which was held in June 1994 in Heidelberg, Germany (the support of the European Communities Concerted Action "Molecular Cytogenetics of Solid Tumours" [BMH1-CT92-0156] is greatly acknowledged). We thank the participants and contributors for creating an open and stimulating atmosphere, and for their enthusiasm and interest which has resulted in this volume. We are also grateful to the reviewers who ensured that each article either represents a sound, high quality, scientific contribution or a balanced and contemporary review of a specific topic. The secretarial assistance of Ingrid Cederlund was particularly appreciated. Compiling this Special Issue with so many papers was an arduous task that took much longer than anticipated. However, we feel that the efforts of all involved were worthwhile, having resulted in a significant and up-to-date contribution to the literature on neuroblastoma, which should be a valuable reference source for anyone involved in this field.

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