

Keynote lectures

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THE ROLE OF COMPLEMENTARY THERAPIES IN CANCER CARE

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The pace of acquisition of molecular knowledge on cancer is rapidly accelerating. Mutations which lead to oncogene products with increased activity or their excess production may lead to abnormal growth patterns. Tumour suppressor genes encode proteins that act as the cell's breaking system. When these are deleted, mutated or down-regulated abnormal growth may result. The proteins encoded by both oncogenes and tumour suppressor genes provide a promising hunting ground in which to design and test new anticancer drugs. Four to six genetic changes appear necessary to produce most human cancers. Over the next five years a much clearer understanding of the molecule pathogenesis of several specific malignancies is likely.

Several strategies for the gene therapy of cancer are now being developed. These include:

- genetic tagging to identify minimal residual disease so providing more information in the use of aggressive chemotherapy
- producing tumour vaccines containing vectors able to locally express cytokines and other immunostimulatory molecules
- the use of gene expression systems for vaccination against specific tumour antigens

- the use of tumour infiltrating lymphocytes to vector biologically active molecules such as TNF to tumours

- the insertion of drug activating genes driven by tumour or tissue specific promoter systems

- direct suppression of abnormal oncogene expression or function

- the replacement of defective tumour suppressor gene function.

Animal models have demonstrated promising results and clinical trials are now in progress with several of these strategies. Over 100 protocols have now been approved and some tumour responses have already been seen.

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COMPLEMENTARY CARE: IMPLICATIONS FOR CANCER NURSING PRACTICE

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Complementary therapies are increasingly used in oncology and palliative care. In the United Kingdom, nurses have been at the forefront of efforts to integrate complementary therapies with existing healthcare services: nurses have examined legal and professional issues, training, codes of conduct plus the advantages and disadvantages of incorporating complementary therapies into their existing body of skills. This paper addresses these issues.