

International Cancer News

Compiled by Robert Short, News Editor, London

From the Globe

Fight Against Cancer in Countries with Limited Resources

Concerned at the rising incidence of cancer in developing countries, with little prospect of more resources becoming available to fight the disease, a group of six physicians and scientists from three continents met at Djerba, Tunisia in August 1995 to address the problem. The participants were members of the editorial committee of the newsletter named *Challenge*, dedicated to promoting the exchange of information relating to cancer in countries with limited resources. *Challenge* was initially launched at the XVI International Cancer Congress in New Delhi at the initiation of the European School of Oncology.

The group attending the meeting noted that while 50% of the world's cancer burden is carried by the developing world, it has access to only 5% of the resources to fight the disease. The death rate from cancer in these countries is set to rise at least 3-fold by the year 2025 largely due to increasing life expectancy, containment of infectious diseases and changing life-style (smoking). The group was concerned at the lack of awareness in the west about this emerging cancer problem and felt that information generated about the rising incidence of cancer in developing countries by agencies such as WHO

deserves wider international attention. The common belief that the cancer problem of countries with limited resources could be solved by transfer of technology and knowledge from the developed world was rejected by those attending the meeting. The group felt that much of the research information and knowledge generated in the west is either not relevant or not applicable to these countries due to differences in social and cultural attitudes, life-styles and lack of sophisticated technologies. The group emphasised the need for original research which addresses unique problems faced by these countries to generate new information and knowledge that are relevant to them.

A short statement embodying these sentiments was published by the group at the end of the meeting which also identified three priority research areas for countries with limited resources. The publication of this statement in reputed journals drew much international attention and this issue was apparently discussed at a meeting of the Task Force for International Affairs of ASCO. Other U.S. and European societies, such as AACR and ESMO, were alerted to this emerging problem.

A year later, in August 1996, a second meeting of *Challenge* was

held in Cairo, this time attended by nearly 25 concerned individuals from 10 countries at which the Djerba Statement was updated, and this version—the Cairo Statement—appears in this issue of the *European Journal of Cancer*. At this meeting, it was decided to form a foundation (also called *Challenge*) to carry out objectives of the group. It was proposed to set up three satellite offices in Bombay, Cairo and Cochabamba, which would work directly with individual scientists and doctors. This approach is distinct from that of WHO and UICC which work largely through governments and cancer institutions. The group hoped that the activities of *Challenge* would be complimentary to those being carried out by these august organizations. *Challenge* would hold yearly meetings—the next one being in Bombay with large participation—and work towards a world conference on the fight against cancer in countries with limited resources in the year 2000.

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