



Introduction

This issue's aims are to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the European Organization for Research and Treatment of Cancer (EORTC); it includes a series of reports prepared by the EORTC groups and by the EORTC Data Center staff highlighting the achievements reached by this unique network of dedicated European investigators. It also stresses the EORTC's on-going activities and future strategies to ensure that high-quality cancer research will continue to establish 'state-of-the-art' treatments for all patients with cancer.

Forty years ago, Prof. Henri Tagnon set up the so-called 'Groupe Européen de Chimiothérapie Anticancéreuse' with a group of European experts aware of the importance of introducing a multidisciplinary approach in the oncology field in Europe. This successful initiative developed into the current EORTC.

Today's EORTC has grown tremendously both in size (the EORTC staff consists of 135 members of 15 nationalities under the leadership of Patrick Therasse) and in recognition all over the world due to the unrestricted commitment of scientists and clinical investigators. The EORTC is indeed a research organisation dedicated to academic clinical research and has shown excellence for establishing 'state-of-the-art' treatments, but also in ensuring that new cancer agents are developed and tested efficiently with the aim of minimising delays between laboratory discovery and their therapeutic benefit for patients.

Over the years, the EORTC has adapted its structure and expanded its premises to respond to tomorrow's challenges. New discoveries in molecular biology have brought optimism about future treatments with the final goal of improving survival and the quality of life of all patients with cancer.

In 2001, the EORTC initiated a virtual tumour bank project which aims to standardise histopathological review methods of the EORTC trials and to promote translational research.

Indeed, in June of the same year, an EORTC Translational Research Meeting was organised in Brussels at the Palais des Congrès to underline the major impact of novel therapies for cancer and to promote translational research in contemporary clinical trials.

Over recent years, a Regulatory Affairs Unit has expanded to master the national laws of more than 35 countries. Its activities are closely linked to the Safety Desk for reporting serious adverse reactions to health authorities and to the Monitoring Unit. The EORTC Data Center has the responsibility to fulfil national and international obligations, i.e. ICH Guidelines (for Good Clinical Practice and for Good Laboratory Practice). It also follows closely the preparation of new EU clinical trials Directive.

The EORTC also created in 2001, a permanent Data Monitoring Committee to review the status of clinical trials and make recommendations to the investigators concerning safety and efficacy leading to the trial's continuation, modification and/or discontinuation.

Lately, decisions have been taken to merge the Early Clinical Studies Group with the Biological Therapeutics Development Group to form the EORTC New Drug Development Group (NDDG). The New Drug Development Programme (NDDP), based at the EORTC Data Center, will continue to provide support to this new Group, but will also share its expertise with all disease-oriented EORTC groups. The NDDG/NDDP will constitute a unique booster for potential new drugs and for methodological issues raised by the development of new molecular targets.

Finally, increasing the awareness of the benefits of clinical research as well as developing international cooperation in clinical research remain strong priorities within the EORTC. It is only through the dissemination of research results and by speeding up the development of anticancer treatments via intergroup studies that patients will obtain the latest innovative and more effective cancer treatments.

We would like to thank all EORTC members and staff who made over the past 40 years a significant contribution to pan-European oncology. We are also grateful to contributors who have enabled this supplement to be published on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the EORTC. Our special thanks to Françoise Meunier, EORTC Director General, Members of the Board and Executive Committee, Chairmen of all the EORTC groups and to all our dedicated personnel working at the EORTC headquarters, in particular

Samantha Christey, for co-ordinating this document with professionalism and kindness.

Finally, we also would like to express our gratitude to all those who have devoted large parts of their lives and time to building up and strengthening the EORTC network, including Prof. Henri Tagnon, co-founder of

the EORTC, who passed away in 2000, and Emmanuel van der Schueren, a former EORTC President (1991–1994) who left us in 1998.

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