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Editorial Comment

The two-faced keeper of gates to heaven

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There are several reasons why Janus the ancient roman god might be adopted as a patron of oncology. Suitably the guardian of the Gate of Heaven, Janus was represented with two faces, one in front and one behind. January is the month dedicated to Janus who presided over the entrance to the New Year, and with his two faces could look back to the past year and forward to the year ahead – we welcome the latter.

2005 was truly an “annus horribilis”. Of all professions, oncologists are particularly used to tragedy and the unfairness of life-threatening illnesses at an inappropriate age, but last year the whole world witnessed natural disasters on an unprecedented scale: the Asian Tsunami; appalling drought in Africa and Western Europe; and in the USA, the hurricane Katrina. The now famous conference centre in New Orleans hosted many oncology conferences, for example, the huge 2004 ASCO meeting and it is through such events that many cancer researchers came to know and love the uniqueness of the “old” New Orleans. The future of this city is uncertain – especially as a conference venue upon which so much of the city’s economy depended. Our heartfelt sympathy has been extended to all those involved. The world is already short of venues capable of hosting the ever increasingly large conferences for which there seems to be an insatiable appetite. Year on year there are more and more conferences attended by more and more enthusiasts – will it ever cease? I have written in these pages before to express a personal hope that we will move to fewer more comprehen-

sive cancer conferences to ensure that quality reigns over quantity, but so far I am swimming against the tide!

One positive aspect of last year was a serious debate of holding one large European Cancer Congress on an annual basis. At present the Federation of European Cancer Societies (FECS) hosts the ECCO meeting every other year and in the alternate year there are large and successful society meetings such as those run by ESTRO and ESMO. Janus would have been pleased with FECS for choosing January last year to convene a meeting of representatives from a wide spectrum of the European oncology community to discuss a new model for oncology in Europe, which could include a single large multidisciplinary annual meeting. Throughout the year the boards of FECS and its member societies have debated the need for reorganisation of European oncology to try and provide a more cohesive structure for the oncology community itself, and specially a more unified “voice” to the outside world. Politicians, health care managers and policy makers, including the public are often confused by the multifaceted (please note many faces not just two!) nature of cancer medicine and research, and some people warn that a failure to develop a more unified structure may result in a relative loss of interest in cancer funding, in favour of other major health needs such as mental health or the care of the elderly for example.

Unification is a real and difficult challenge (examples include the European Union) and there are major problems to

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address to preserve the visibility and identity of the different individual disciplines involved in cancer management, and to devise ways of managing financial aspects of current society activity in a fair and equitable way. Problems are there to be solved and I am confident that Janus would give us his blessing this January to continue these discussions in a positive and constructive way during the coming year.

The *EJC* is the official journal for FECS, EORTC, EACR, ESO, and EUSOMA and the editorial team will do everything that we can to promote and facilitate this debate over the future of oncology in Europe. The journal is in excellent health with

last year a record number of submissions and ever increasing activity in on-line usage. Our periodic review of the 10 most widely accessed articles confirm the multidisciplinary interest of our journals' appeal, which is central to the mission pursued by the editors.

The doors of Janus's temple in Rome were thrown open in times of war and closed in times of peace. Let us hope that in 2006 our minds will stay open for the ways of progress and the temple doors stay firmly shut! On behalf of all the editorial and publishing team we wish you a happy but above all peaceful New Year.