

# ECHO

Spotlight on research

## Give it a break!

Without a doubt, the battle that research is waging against cancer holds out hope for the future. This is true in many fields, from the pharmaceutical industry to biotechnology and genetic engineering. The energy put into fighting the disease will continue to push back the frontiers of what we know about how human beings function. We are firmly convinced that the coming years will reward the enormous efforts made in the areas of both preventative medicine and the creation of therapies and techniques for curing cancer. Thanks to the revolutions that punctuate this long and arduous battle, research has gained in speed and conviction. But there is one thing we must never forget: the daily struggle of cancer sufferers and their families, who must live with the doubts and fears that are so much a part of the illness. Science is making great strides, but it is still not advancing fast enough for them. To see the day when cancer is no longer a fatal word, we must keep supporting the people whose work keeps hope alive.

Thierry F. Ador

## Living proof

**Sun warning...**

Switzerland holds the inglorious record for frequency of skin cancer, with one of the highest rates in the world, **twice to three times as high** as that of any other country in Europe. According to Ms Bouchardy of the Geneva Tumour Register, there is an explanation: *"the Swiss population has a mainly fair, Germanic type of skin"* she says. *"In addition, our country's high standard of living means that people spend more leisure time in the mountains or at the seaside. Attitudes to sun exposure will have to change, along with the idea, ingrained in our culture, that in a mountainous country, open-air life is good and the sun cannot be bad."* **The medical profession is taking action against the 10,000 new cases of cancer diagnosed each year in Switzerland.** *"Getting a tan is a question of fashion. At twenty years old, we have already used up 80% of our sun-protection capital, and there is a time delay of ten to twenty years between sun-abuse and the signs of skin cancer. Even though only ten percent of cancers are melanomas and therefore fatal, it is vital that people in our country learn to protect themselves from the harmful effects of the sun."*

Source: *Mise au Point*, July 2001

## What's up, doc?

**Viruses are currently very welcome** in cancer research. About ten microorganisms, responsible for killing or repairing tumorous cells, are making the rounds of the labs. Tested in several Swiss hospitals, these (deactivated) viruses could become powerful tools in the fight against cancer. At the beginning of the year, a symposium at the ISREC brought researchers and specialists together to review their findings. The use of viruses as vehicles in the body will enable genes to be sent directly to the malignant cells, without touching the healthy cells.

Another technique consists of using these microorganisms to deprive the tumour of food and oxygen, by attacking the blood supply that the diseased cells need in order to proliferate. Many tests are under way, but the real progress consists of focusing on the cancerous cells without destroying or harming the healthy ones.

Source: *l'Hebdo*, January 2001

**Researchers solve medical problems, we solve their money problems**

**Cancer & Solidarité**  
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## On the front line

True to its objectives, Cancer & Solidarity is now financing the work of three new researchers, to whom it has accorded grants. Frenchman **Dr Ahmed Boumedienne**, working in Professor Lassoued's laboratory in Amiens, is studying the differentiation of the precursors of B cells in human beings, or more specifically, cell cancerisation. **Dr Jürg Schwaller**, of Switzerland, at the Institut de Pathologie de l'Université de Genève, is pursuing a programme based on detailed analysis of the specific chromosomal changes of certain lymphomas. His work has already contributed to a better understanding of leukaemia and lymphomas and has improved diagnostic quality.

**Dr Amy Lundquist** has focused on the Kaposi sarcoma, an atypical cancer linked to a hypervirus. Her research takes the form of post-doctoral work at an INSERM/CNRS laboratory in Angers.

## Planet research.

- The Institut National de la Santé et de la Recherche médicale (INSERM) had forecast **2,000 cases of cancer due to asbestos** in 1998. The declared figure was over **3,500 cases**: a very disturbing result for workers removing asbestos fibre from buildings. They are still waiting for a law to be passed regulating this procedure.

Source : Sciences & Vie n° 1005

- **What can be done about the secondary effects of chemotherapy?** Dr Joannie Shen, at the Bethesda Health Institute in the US, has tried **electro-acupuncture**. He observed two groups of women under treatment for breast cancer and given anti-nausea care. Electrical stimulation, whether of the appropriate acupuncture points or of placebo points, reduced vomiting considerably. However, the effect did not continue beyond the end of the treatment.

Source : Réponse Santé n° 109

- In Geneva, **screening for breast cancer has been provided free of charge since January 2001**. The initiative reflects the statistics, since this city sadly has the highest incidence of breast cancer in Europe (see Echo no.7). The aim of the programme is to reduce deaths by breast cancer, of which only a third of cases

## Vital statistics

### A few figures on cancer

- √ In France, **one out of every two men and one out of three women** will eventually contract cancer. The disease is the primary cause of male deaths and second cause of female deaths, after cardiovascular illnesses.
- √ The number of cancer cases diagnosed has risen **40% in twenty years**. This is explained in part by our population's longer life expectancy and increasingly early diagnosis.
- √ Over **160,000 new cases** are diagnosed each year.
- √ The most frequent sites are:  
In men: lungs (**17%**), colon-rectum (**14%**), pharynx (**13%**), prostate (**10%**), larynx (**10%**). In women: breast (**30%**), colon-rectum (**16%**), uterus (**12%**), stomach (**5%**), ovaries (**4%**).
- √ Today about **50%** of cancers are cured.

Source: Santé Magazine n° 302

are now diagnosed in the early stages, and also to improve the quality of life for the women concerned. For further information, please contact **the Centre de coordination du dépistage du cancer du sein**, on **(022) 320 28 28**. Bravo to the Ligue Genevoise contre le Cancer, who launched this idea.

- Cancer & Solidarity are innovating. You may now send your donations direct to our **site [www.cancer-solidarity.ch](http://www.cancer-solidarity.ch)**, "Donations" section. We thank you in advance.

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