

ECHO

Spotlight on research

Give it a break!

Research and political imperatives, or a confrontation between two different worlds. On 9th March 2004, two thousand French researchers, including 976 Unit Directors and 1,101 group heads, resigned from their posts. Whether this is a symbolic decision or a means of putting pressure on the political powers, in July a national committee here must consider the future of research and formulate a set of proposals for the guidance and programming law promised by the French government. A divergence of viewpoints in which the stakes, depending on what side you are on, cannot be quantified. When it is decided to make cancer a national research priority and yet the budget allocated to it is reduced by 20%, it is right to be shocked and to restart the debate. Does research really have a price when the lives of thousands of people, young and old, are at stake? For them and for all the others who have paid the price with their lives, the limits of research are not those of the economy. We hope that a true debate will be opened and that in future the needs of those who promote research will no longer run up against the constraints of the authorities.

Thierry F. Ador et Olivier Ador

Living proof

The organs most affected by cancer are the colon and rectum, the lung, the breast in women and the prostate in men. Now, these tumours are also the most sensitive to our dietary habits. "At birth, the body possesses a number of genes that manufacture antioxidant substances able to capture, reduce or moderate free radicals, which are chemical entities derived from the environment (pollution, etc.) and some foods", explains Prof. Lucien Israël. "However, these antioxidant defences gradually diminish with age, which explains, among other things, the appearance of some diseases such as cancer. To increase the consumption of antioxidants such as those contained in vegetables and fruits will not reverse the process when the disease is already there, because the protective genes have been damaged. On the other hand, an antioxidant-rich diet combined with correct doses of dietary supplements, calorie restriction and regular physical exercise would considerably reduce the risks if these measures were adopted early in life".

Source: Santé Magazine n° 331

What's up, doc?

For a long time now it has no longer been taboo to talk about breast cancer. **However, it is quite different when it concerns cancer of the prostate.** As the second most common cause of cancer deaths, **3,000 to 3,500 new cases are diagnosed each year in Switzerland, and 1,500 deaths are caused by this disease.** Many of these premature deaths could be avoided if detection was performed more systematically from the age of forty years. Now, it is known that many men will do anything to avoid having to confront an unpleasant reality, especially one that may involve their sexuality. Even more so because in this instance it raises the spectre of health

problems likely to affect their virility, a faculty that is often physically robust but governed by a fragile psychology. Although general practitioners must offer screening to their patients, they have no right to impose it on them. Great progress needs to be made in communication and dialogue. The day when men approach their prostate problems with the same natural ease that women talk about their breast cancer, free of emotional hang-ups, there will be a great decrease in deaths directly due to this type of cancer.

Source: Le Temps, october 2003

Researchers solve medical problems, we solve their money problems.

 **Cancer & Solidarité**
Fondation

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CCP 40-196754-9

On the front line

Three new researchers have been financed by the Foundation this year:

- **Doctor Andrea De Gottardi, at the Geneva Cantonal University Hospital**, whose project is a study of the role of bile acid receptors in cancer of the oesophagus;
- **Mrs. Nathalie Cahuzac, at the Lacassagne Anticancer Centre in Nice**. A study of the molecular mechanisms of the antitumour activity of alkyl-lysophospholipids (ALPs) in relation to cell death initiated by the fas/CD95 receptor.
- **Doctor Housseem Benlalam, at the Ludwig Institute for Cancer Research in Lausanne**. Project concerning tumour immunology and more specifically the role of naïve T lymphocytes specific for antigen Melan-A/MART-1.

In addition, a supplementary grant has been awarded to **Mrs. Hinda Hamzaoui** to pursue her research programme at the **Lariboisière Hospital in Paris** (Echo No. 14).

Vital statistics

Tobacco kills! In western countries, **lung cancer** is the most common cause of cancer deaths in men and is a source of increasing mortality in women. Some startling figures include: **1 smoker in 2** will die from the consequences of smoking. Because of its pernicious course and the difficulties of early detection, a patient with lung cancer has only a mediocre chance of a cure (**about 15%**). Lung cancer affects **about 3,200 persons each year in Switzerland** (45 per 100,000), and **40%** of bronchial cancers are diagnosed in persons **under 65 years of age**. The disease nowadays affected **one in 4 women**.

After decades of continuous growth in the number of cases of lung cancer in men, a turn-around has started: the number of new cases among men is diminishing slightly whereas it is increasing significantly in women. It can be foreseen that the lung cancer curve in women will rise to meet the breast cancer curve some time between **2012 and 2015**.

Source: Carrefour Prévention

Planet research.

- **An experimental vaccine, GVAX**, developed by researchers at the Baylor University of Dallas, seems to cure some people with **lung cancer** and to slow its progression in others. This is the result of an American study, and scientists hope to obtain a licence from the FDA in three years from now.
- **Researchers at the Ludwig Institute have developed a therapeutic vaccine** which doctors at the CHUV and the Multidisciplinary Oncology Centre have already tested in about sixty patients. Now they are trying **a double vaccination**. The first step is to vaccinate patients in order to "boost" their cytotoxic cells. Then some of them are extracted in order to select the most effective. After reducing the number of lymphocytes still in the circulation, they are reinjected into the patient's blood. Then comes the second vaccination, which should stimulate the immune killer cells. As Jean-Charles Cerottini, Director of the Institute says "This is a unique treatment".
- **The 5 measures of the Breast Cancer Plan in France:** a survey by **Doctor David Khayat**, permanent adviser to the Cancer Mission. Detection, road map, individualised follow-up, patient referral, evaluation. An operational guide to allow "exemplary" management of the disease and its repercussions.

Source : le Temps, february 2004

Source: l'Hebdo, february 2004

Source : Marie Claire, october 2003



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