

ECHO

Spotlight on research

Give it a break!

Amazement in Geneva. The public health programme providing free breast cancer screening for women aged 50 years and over has been interrupted! There is no longer any agreement between doctors, insurers and the other parties active in prevention on the reimbursement procedure. As the Chairmen of the Cancer & Solidarity Foundation, we are very surprised by this negative development. However, the figures speak for themselves... (See the section "Figures and letters" below). For 10 years, thanks to the active screening effort in the canton, we have noted a significant decrease in the number of deaths caused by this disease. Why jeopardize a programme that allowed women to be taken care of with the aim of detecting this type of pathology more quickly? In this legal and political muddle, all attempts at negotiations between the various actors in this "farce" have failed. Although the matter has been brought up before the Council of State, it is very likely that a number of months, or even years will be required before a consistent and univocal position is reached between the medical community and the insurers. However, a question remains unanswered: what should we do and say during this time to the first cases affected?

Thierry F. Ador et Olivier Ador

Living proof

On 24 May 2005, the National Cancer Institute (INCA) in Paris opened its doors for the first time. Professor David Khayat, its Chairman, explained what the exact role of this new institute is going to be: "In France, 1 man out of 2 and 1 woman out of 3 is affected by cancer. And, unfortunately, 150,000 people die of this disease every year. Inca's role consists essentially of coordinating, evaluating and financing all means used in the struggle against cancer, in all regions, overcoming any compartmentalization. It is absolutely vital to share intelligence, knowledge and facilities, with the aim of meeting the expectations and requirements of those who are suffering today and of those who will follow them tomorrow. Our duty towards these people is enormous, and our response must be exemplary."

Source: Point Santé, June 2005

What's up, doc?

According to the Swiss Cancer Prevention League, a healthy life style is a powerful ally in the struggle against cancer. This includes a balanced diet, rich in fruit and vegetables, and a moderate consumption of red meat and alcohol. Recent studies have shown that the protection provided by fruit and vegetables is less important than had been assumed. However, it varies from one kind of cancer to another, and the influence of food on the development of cancers remains undisputed in medical and scientific circles. Each person in Switzerland consumes on average 1.7

portions per day of fruit and vegetables. In absolute terms, five portions are recommended. **To prevent cancer, apart from a varied diet rich in fibres, maintaining normal weight, living a healthy life and performing daily physical exercise (30 minutes per day) are other good habits to acquire.**

Source: Tribune de Genève, March 2005

Researchers solve medical problems, we solve their money problems.

 **Cancer & Solidarité**
Fondation

A non profit organization
CCP 40-196754-9

On the front line

The Cancer & Solidarity Foundation this year is financing the work of two new researchers:

- **Miss Armèle Orosco, at Hôpital Lariboisière in Paris, France.** Her project is focused on how to take advantage of the role of Syndecan 2 in the biology of human osteosarcomas. This molecule interacts with many ligands that are known to influence essential cellular properties, such as proliferation.
- **Doctor Luis Bermudez-Humarán, at l'INRA in Jouy-en-Josas, France.** The project aims to take advantage of the immunogenic potential of lactobacilli that have been genetically modified to express HPV virus proteins. This strategy could provide a new therapeutic approach to the prevention of cervical cancers.

Planet research.

- Pharmaceutical companies have announced **that vaccines against the rotavirus**, which is responsible for gastroenteritis, and against the human papillomavirus, which is responsible for cervical cancers, should be launched on the market between now and 2007.

Source : Tribune de Genève, February 2005

- American researchers have identified a protein that allows cancerous skin cells to spread. Scientists from the University of Stanford explained that **Collagen VII**, which plays an essential role in preserving skin, is also used by cancerous tumours for their propagation.

Source: Science, Spring 2005



A non profit organization
CCP 40-196754-9

Vital statistics

The suspicion has been lurking for some years. Today the figures have been revealed: in French-speaking Western Switzerland, **the number of women who died from lung cancer is equal to that of the women who died from breast cancer.** On the one hand, between 1985 and 2002, the number of deaths due to breast cancer in Geneva decreased by half. An active screening effort has caused the mortality among women of 55 to 74 years to decrease by 30% over 10 years. On the other hand, there has been a constant increase in the number of deaths caused by lung cancer, which is directly linked to tobacco addiction. Knowing that the consumption of tobacco progressed with lightening speed in the 1980s and 90s, the death rate could quadruple around 2015-2020. Even though the curves of the two cancers in Switzerland are not yet about to cross, the figures for the French-speaking cantons lead us to suppose that their convergence is inevitable. In 1995, there were 1554 deaths from breast cancer against 600 from lung cancer, i.e. a ratio of 2.6. In 2001, this ratio fell to 1.8, i.e. 1333 breast cancers against 724 lung cancers.

Source : Tribune de Genève, December 2004

- Patients operated **for lung cancer during the summer** have twice the probability of still being alive five years after than those operated during the winter. American scientists have hypothesized that this difference could be linked to vitamin D, as its blood rate depends, among other things, on sunshine. Other studies are going to begin to verify this particularly attractive hypothesis, as lung cancer is the most lethal of all cancers worldwide and vitamin D is a widespread and inexpensive treatment.

Source : Harvard University, August 2005

Researchers solve
medical problems,
we solve their
money problems