

ECHO

Spotlight on research

Give it a break!

In the battle against cancer, one must face the fact that patients and those who are closest to them often feel ill-equipped to cope with this difficult reality. In France, a white paper from the first States General of cancer patients was submitted to the former Secretary of State for Health and Social Welfare, Bernard Kouchner. The document recorded the experiences of 3,000 people: cancer sufferers, their immediate family and friends, and their medical staff. It enabled all those directly concerned to express their experiences, their fears, their needs and also their demands. As presidents of Cancer & Solidarity Foundation, we heartily salute this initiative. We are well aware that whilst, over the years, tremendous force has been brought to bear in the fight against cancer, and particularly in research into new treatments, patients and their families frequently regret the lack of communication and information. As a result, and without competing in any way with the medical profession, numerous benevolent organizations have been bringing support to cancer sufferers. By their understanding and their presence, they reply to the essential need for dialogue and for help in coming to terms with oneself and with life. This kind of psychological and social support, sign of a true commitment in terms of human solidarity, is often sadly lacking from politically-based projects. A growing collective awareness must incite medical bodies to increase the importance given to psychological support; and especially, to adopt a more human approach to their patients, at every stage of the illness.

Thierry F. and Olivier Ador, Presidents

Living proof

Christine Janin, doctor, mountain climber, creator of the «A chacun son Everest» Foundation.

«At the beginning, I visited children in hospitals to tell them about my expeditions; but very soon, I wanted to go further... I wanted to talk to them about their illness as if they were climbing a mountain of their own, with the summit being their recovery. And so, five years ago, the association «A chacun son Everest» was born. My idea was for the children to take the leading role in their recovery rather than to be an audience for my adventures. Today, I work with twelve hospitals, and we have already taken 600 children on a week's programme concerned with conquering their mountain. Our aim is to help them take up normal lives again and prove to them that they are capable of the same things as anyone else. With the support of medical professionals our approach becomes part of the remission process: by giving the children goals to reach, we enable them to believe in the future again, and see themselves as children who can realise their dreams and pursue their ambitions, and not just as children who are ill. Our wish for the year 2000? The creation of a centre at Chamonix».

Source: France 3, February 99

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

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What's up, doc?

Several promising projects were presented to the 450 specialists who took part in the symposium «Cancer and the cell cycle» organised by the ISREC at the end of January in Lausanne. Researchers from the world over were able to share information and present their latest work. Presentations of particular note included the work of the American researcher Robert Weinberg: he has developed a protocol by

which a cancerous human cell can be created from a healthy cell under laboratory conditions. This represents a major step forward for researchers, who can now work freely on human cells. Fellow American Luis Prada was also remarked for his presentation of a transonic mouse which reproduces for the first time all forms of colon cancer, included metastases. In addition, a British researcher

presented a new technique which increases the reliability of diagnostic tests for cancer of the cervix.

Source: Le Temps, February 99

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On the front line

Dr Maya Von Planta, to whom the Foundation awarded a grant in 1997, has undertaken research, in the paediatric department (onco-hematological unit), of the Geneva cantonal university hospital, into the in vitro culture of hematopoietic progenitors of umbilical blood. This project aims at improving the cell's ability to reconstitute hematopoiesis in a context of allogeneic transplant. This pre-clinical programme is based on the data currently available concerning the transplantation of umbilical blood in allogeneic situations. The data reveal the feasibility of allogeneic grafts, primarily in children, as well as how slowly neutrophils and platelets are reconstituted.

Planet research.

- **100,000:** that is the number of male deaths by cancer each year in France; **25% more than the rate for women.** One of the reasons for the higher rate amongst males is that men tend to wait months or more, before seeing a doctor.

Source: *Avantages*, February 99

- Some figures on breast cancer: **55 is the average age when breast cancer is discovered.** Today in seven cases out of ten, breast removal is avoided; when the tumour does not exceed 3 cm the breast can be saved. Today, **60% of breast cancer cases are healed.**

Source: *Capital Santé*, March 99

- A treatment associating **immunotherapy** (factor of tumoral necrosis) and **chemotherapy** has been tested for the first time at the Institut Gustave-Roussy (Villejuif). This therapy, applied to sarcomas and melanomas, enables amputation to be avoided in more than eight cases out of ten.

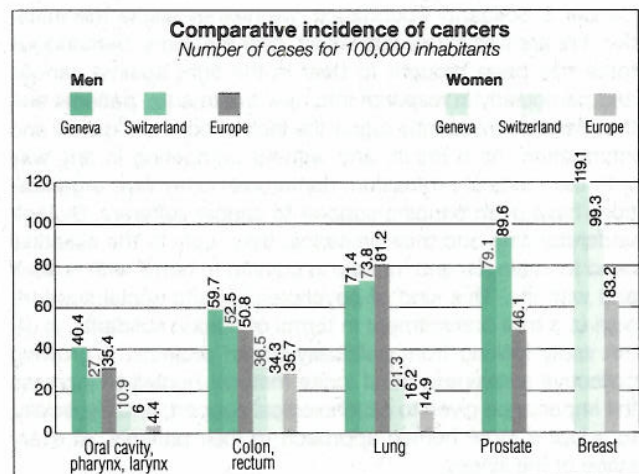
Source: *Science & Vie*, March 99

- According to the review **"Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences"** a protein with high anti-cancer potential, **Tropine 1**, has been discovered in human cartilage by researchers at Boston Hospital. **This protein has already healed cancerous tumours** in almost half the mice into which it was injected.

Source: *m Magazine*, May 99

Vital statistics

According to a report requested by the department of Social Welfare and Health, **Geneva is notable for its particularly high incidence of cancer.** Tumours are responsible for **30% of male deaths and 25% of female deaths**, corresponding to about 900 per year. Geneva exceeds the national average by **3.2%** and the European average by **14.1%**. The difference is even greater for women: **+ 14%** compared with the rest of Switzerland and **21%** compared with the European Union. Doctors diagnose **1,700 new cases every year:** amongst men, prostate cancer (17.7%) is followed by lung cancer (15.9%). Amongst women, breast cancer remains the most frequent (33%).



Source: *Geneva Department of Health*

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