

# ECHO

Spotlight on research

## Give it a break!

"On the one hand, there is the harsh reality of cancer, with the number of cases growing every year; on the other, the constant battle to conquer it. And in the struggle to gain new therapeutic ground, one vital factor is of immediate concern to us as presidents of the Cancer & Solidarity Foundation: namely, the infrastructure of the oncology division at the University Hospital of Geneva. This division's strong commitment to advancing research is increasing hopes of recovery and pushing back the frontiers of possible treatment. However, actually bringing the benefits to the large number of cancer patients demands far greater resources in terms of both facilities and personnel; this, for both in-hospital and out-patient treatments, whether chemotherapy, radiotherapy or others. The division could then, not only cope with more patients, but place more emphasis on the caring, supportive environment that they require. Geneva Hospital has a vanguard position in the battle against cancer; it is essential that its oncology division obtain the means of putting its potential to work, in order to live up to the hopes of those for whom it is fighting".

Thierry F. Ador and Olivier Ador, Presidents

## What's up, doc?

A team of researchers at the Institut Pasteur and the University of California announced in April that **a general vaccination against cancer could soon see the light of day**. The immune system is capable of learning to detect malignant cells in order to destroy them, **thanks to the action of a chromosome-repairing enzyme: Telomerase**. The research team has succeeded in using Telomerase to develop a molecule that teaches the immune system's T

lymphocyte to recognise cancerous cells. Results of in vitro work on the cells of mice seem to indicate that a vaccination could be created. Nevertheless, the researchers are reserving judgement. Clinical trials are still to be conducted with humans. **If they are conclusive, this discovery could transform the battle against cancer.**

Source: Réponses Santé, May 2000

## Living proof

From a personal account of the "trip"

**December 28th...** today I leave hospital, the blood tests look fine. Intensive chemotherapy, but I'm managing well. **December 29th...** chemo is like an orgasm, you feel it from the tips of your toes to the roots of your hair. Minus the pleasure, but it's worth it. **January 15th...** I'm drained, I look transparent. This chemo is exhausting... I've got no energy, no appetite, I'm nauseous and very down. **February 19th...** on to the next step: re-planning my life, knowing I'm cured ??? But followed up by my doctor.

... cancer is a fact of life, like the colour of your eyes. I never felt tempted to pretend it wasn't there. I wanted to fight it, face to face, with all the force and anger that was in me. I believe that it happened because I wanted it to, or at least I let it happen. It 's mine and from now on I have to live with it; but I'll do everything in my power to keep it in check. It's a useful, even essential part of me, because it has taught me to value my life and to want to make something of it.

For that, thank you cancer!

Researchers solve  
medical problems,  
we solve their money  
problems

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## On the front line

As part of its promotional work, Cancer & Solidarity Foundation recently organised the first "open-day visit" to the oncology division of the University Hospital of the Canton of Geneva. During the half-day programme, whose theme was "**Cancer: from basic research to the patient's bedside**", Professor André-Pascal Sappino and his team presented their department's organisation and explained the research challenges and their clinical application. This informative visit focused on three objectives: presenting the research and its application in the hospital; increasing public awareness of the medical progress being made; and demystifying cancer. Presentations were made by the doctors involved on a variety of subjects, including two basic research programmes, the application of different treatments, and how patients are received and accompanied during their illness. These were followed by a visit to two research laboratories and the patients' section of the oncology division. Cancer & Solidarity sincerely thanks **Prof. André-Pascal Sappino, Dr Pierre-Yves Dietrich, Dr Claudine Helg, Dr Nicolas Mach, Dr Anne Hügli and Dr Patricia Waltz** for the time spent sharing this important information.

## Vital statistics

The World Health Organisation reports that **if 100 million people died as a direct result of smoking during the twentieth century**, the score for the current century is likely to be a billion. **In developed countries**, it is estimated that **42 per cent of men and 24 per cent of women smoke**; in developing countries, the figures are **48 per cent and 7 per cent respectively**.

**Every year, smoking kills approximately 3.5 million people** throughout the world, with 60,000 in France alone, **and triggers at least 1.5 million new cancers**. It is the chief cause of avoidable sickness and death. Smoking is responsible for 80 per cent of lung cancers, 40 per cent of cancers of the bladder, and around 30 per cent of cancers of the kidneys and pancreas. Combined with alcohol, it causes 85 to 95 per cent of cancers of the larynx, throat, oesophagus and oral cavity. Women who smoke have a higher risk of cervical cancer.

Source: World Health Organisation  
Extract from the "Smoking or Health" report  
Ligue Nationale contre le cancer - April 2000

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## Planet research.

- A major international movement to combat cancer is now under way. One result is the anti-cancer Charter of Paris, which has been signed by numerous personalities from science, industry, politics and the arts. Its impact will be measured in February 2001. You too are invited to sign the Charter on the Internet: [www.charteagainstcancer.org](http://www.charteagainstcancer.org)

- Researchers in the UK have developed a means **of defining the risk of recurrence in cases of colon cancer**. The method employs a scan to determine a Doppler hepatic perfusion index, which can be used to predict the risk of recurrence in patients operated on for this type of cancer.

Source: Santérama n°9

- Thanks to progress in medical imaging, prostate cancer is deriving new benefits from an old form of therapy: **curietherapy. The latter consists of inserting rods of**

**iodine-125 directly into the prostate, so as to irradiate and destroy the diseased cells**. Modern imaging techniques enable the rods to be placed with great precision in the affected areas, with a resulting recovery rate of 80 per cent.

Source: l'Hebdo, February 2000

- **On November 25th 2000, la Ligue contre le cancer will hold the second States General for cancer sufferers**. Patients, their families or friends and medical staff are invited to make concrete proposals on all aspects that could lead to improved treatments and enhanced quality of life.

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