Seven Research Projects Urged For Countries With Limited Resources

Developing countries are working toward a more proactive role in the transfer of technology and information related to cancer research and treatment. During a recent meeting in Cairo, Egypt, seven main research projects were outlined, fulfilling the sponsoring organization’s main goal: to encourage and conduct original research on the cancer problems of developing nations. Challenge, the sponsor, is an initiative of the European School of Oncology that began in 1994 as a quarterly newsletter, and evolved into a foundation devoted to research on cancer in those countries.

"Technology transfer and research information in the past have only been in one direction," said Indraneel Mittra, M.D., Ph.D., surgeon at Tata Memorial Hospital in Bombay, India, and one of Challenge’s founders. "Much of the research in the West is often not relevant or [is] inapplicable in countries with limited resources."

Challenge’s first meeting a year ago identified priority research areas: development of simple, relevant recommendations to increase cancer awareness among health professionals and the public in countries with limited resources; early detection and prevention of the common cancers afflicting these populations (often very different from cancers prevalent in the developed world); and definition of appropriate mechanisms to involve all possible partners in developing innovative public health research in cancer.

Cancer incidence and death rates in developing countries — an estimated 50% of the world’s cancer burden are rising rapidly, yet these countries have only around 5% of the world’s resources, a major cause of concern for members of Challenge.

Those attending the initial meeting also called for more original research. Participants from South America, Africa, the Middle East, East Asia, and Eastern Europe signed a statement that "most of the currently available information and knowledge on prevention, detection and treatment of cancer generated by the developed world is not applicable to developing countries" due to the differences in cultures, lifestyles, and availability of sophisticated technologies.

At this year’s meeting, which attracted twice as many scientists, physicians, and concerned individuals from 10 countries, the seven targeted research projects identified were:

- A study of behavioral and psychosocial factors influencing tobacco use in countries with limited resources.
- A need to determine the prevalence of tobacco use and what influences smoking initiation, and then find
appropriate approaches to combating tobacco use.

• Research into simple but effective methods of early detection. Many cancer cases in these countries are diagnosed after symptoms have appeared, because people cannot afford screening tests such as mammography. There is a need to find other affordable tests that could enable earlier detection of prevalent cancers, including breast, cervical, and head and neck.

• Research on the treatment of childhood and adolescent cancers. Most of the world’s children are in developing countries. For example, 53% of Egypt’s population is under 15 years of age, and 70% of India’s population is under 35. Moreover, most childhood and adolescent cancers consist of lymphomas and leukemias, which have a high degree of treatment success.

• Compilation of a list of effective and affordable anticancer drugs as a reference for physicians.

• A comparative study of various cultural, psychosocial, and behavioral factors that could affect a patient’s quality of life and treatment outcome.

• Research to identify the most common preventable cancers in countries with limited resources, and to provide primary prevention recommendations.

• Research to develop ways to provide countries with limited resources with accessible, up-to-date cancer treatment information, and to create a system to adapt information from existing cancer databases to the needs of clinicians in countries with limited resources.

Challenge plans to set up satellite offices in South America, North Africa, and East Asia and will work directly with individual scientists and doctors.

Such a grassroots approach is quite distinct from that of the World Health Organization and the International Union Against Cancer, which work mostly with governments, cancer centers, and institutions. “This organization is not in competition, but is complementary to such organizations,” said Alberto Costa, M.D., Director of the European School of Oncology and one of Challenge’s founders.

In addition to funding and conducting original research, Challenge’s future plans include wider distribution of its newsletter, annual meetings, and a world conference in the year 2000.

— Dina Ra’ad

Awards, Appointments, Announcements

The American Statistical Association, Alexandria, Va., recently named Sholom Wacholder, Ph.D., as a fellow. He is a mathematical statistician in the National Cancer Institute’s Division of Epidemiology and Genetics. The designation of fellow signifies “an individual’s outstanding professional contribution and leadership in the field of statistical science,” according to the announcement. The association, which has 18,500 members, named 60 of its members as fellows this year.

Berger Named Dean

The Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, named Nathan A. Berger, M.D., as dean of its School of Medicine and vice president for medical affairs, effective Sept. 1. He served in those capacities on an interim basis for a year while the university conducted a national search.

A professor of medicine and biochemistry at the university, Berger for 10 years was director of the university’s Ireland Cancer Research Center and was chief of the hematology and oncology division of University Hospitals of Cleveland.

Clarke Named President

U. S. Bioscience, Inc., West Conshohocken, Pa., named C. Boyd Clarke as president and chief operating officer. He had been a vice president at Merck & Co. before assuming his new position.

Philip S. Schein, M.D., chairman and chief executive officer of U. S. Bioscience, said Clarke’s experience will help the company make “the transition from a development to a full operating company.” U. S. Bioscience