Europe and that the NDDO should thus remain an instrument within its structure, people in Amsterdam feel that on a continent with more than 500 million people there are and will be more and more organizations interested in the development of new drugs. They believe that they could play the role of the only Center in Europe devoted exclusively to new drugs development and like, for instance, the NCI in the US, remain open to cooperative arrangements with many different organizations. At the moment it is difficult to predict how things will go in the future. The crisis between NDDO and EORTC might be interpreted as a sign of the growing importance of oncology, and therefore of new drug development in Europe. Crises are sometimes bids for a better future.

A successful cancer march

Driven by despair, but also by impatience and hope, an estimated 150,000 people held a rally on 26 September on the Mall in front of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, DC in the first-ever march against cancer.

Celebrities, politicians and cancer patients with their friends and family members demanded that the nation make curing the disease its top health care priority. Organizers called it simply 'The March', stating as its goal: 'No more cancer'. In particular, they pressed a single point on Congress: if the government would spend more money on cancer research, many lives could be saved. The US government already spends more on cancer research than on any other disease, including heart disease, which in fact, is the more virulent killer. However, when spending is divided by the number of people afflicted, cancer research receives perhaps only a third as much money per patient as AIDS. Led by cancer survivors, thousands turned out on the Mall to press Congress and the White House to increase funding for efforts to cure cancer and to ensure that this disease - expected to kill almost 570,000 Americans this year - is not outdistanced in the race for research money. Vice President Al Gore, whose sister died of cancer, told the crowd assembled before the Capitol steps "This marks high noon for cancer. We are determined." He added "The dream can happen in our lifetime: Imagine waking up in a world where children in kindergarten start the year with a nap, a flu shot and a routine cancer immunization."

Former Republican Presidential Candidate Bob Dole, a prostate cancer survivor, made known his personal mission to publicize the need for men to undergo regular check-ups. ABC's television newscaster Sam Donaldson, also a cancer survivor, pointing to the vast amount of money the United States devotes to military equipment, said "We spend on one B-2 bomber, at the moment, as much as we, as a government, spend on cancer research in a year." The key to the struggle against cancer is increased government spending on research, one organizer said. The American Society of Clinical Oncology, the nation's main organisation of cancer physicians, recommends a 35% increase in the budget of the National Cancer Institute, to $3.2 billion in the next year. "We are paying $100 billion a year for cancer treatment and funerals, about $2 billion for research", said the Rev. Jesse Jackson, a participant in Saturday's event. He added "something is wrong in that picture".

The Washington rally, held in conjunction with similar events in almost 200 other cities in the US, was aimed at raising awareness and pushing for more research. Some 'March' participants noted the success of AIDS activists who have obtained seats on research advisory boards and billions of dollars from Congress. Echoing former rallies, Saturday's cancer activists featured quilts with hundred of patches in memory of individuals, especially children, who have been taken by cancer. The March also featured performances by musicians David Crosby, Graham Nash and Aretha Franklin.

However, not everyone was convinced that pumping more money into cancer research would solve the problems. For instance, a leader of Breast Cancer Action, one of several activist groups that declined to back the march, stated that "The situation is not going to be changed by just throwing more money at the problem, (...) there is a shortage in the field of cancer prevention and a lack of strategic thinking." Ways to hasten the conquest of cancer would be to eliminate bureaucratic obstacles, increase vital research and improve cooperation among groups and individuals fighting the disease.

The March was hugely successful and has attracted the attention of some politicians: "I suspect there's not a family in America who can't talk about a personal experience or at least a dear friend who has been lost to cancer", said Senator Connie Mack, a conservative Republican from Florida, who watched both his parents and his young brother die of cancer "I'm here on behalf
of eight million cancer survivors, on behalf of all of us"; he said. Organizers announced their hope to make the March against cancer an annual event.

R. Antonini, Washington

American pediatric merger spurns Europe

At a meeting in July the heads of four pediatric oncology groups met at a conference center at O'Hare Airport in Chicago, and unexpectedly but spontaneously decided to form a joint pediatric clinical trials organisation.

The four groups are the Pediatric Oncology Group (POG), the Children's Cancer Group (CCG), the Intergroup Rhabdomyosarcoma Study Group and the National Wilms Tumour Study Group. Sharon Murphy, chairman of the POG, stated that "The time was absolutely right to announce our engagement. Now the time has come to put things together to create a treatment and research strategy for pediatric cancer patients."

Combining of the efforts of these four groups will make it possible to speed up treatment research, an imperative in view of the severe side effects of the treatment of children with cancer. Since cure rates are high, the objectives must be to determine where treatment can be minimised or where it must be changed to achieve a 100% cure rate. As one participant remarked, "When you start with an 80% cure rate and want to show a 90% you need to know which is that 20% that needs another treatment."

For groups outside the US the merger of these four American groups could be an example of how to proceed. There are some pan-European groups such as the Wilms Tumour Study, the Malignant Mesenchymal Tumour Study and the Hepatoblastoma Study conducted by the International Society of Pediatric Oncology (SIOP), but most studies are being conducted on a national basis. Furthermore, in Europe there are the UK Leukemia Study, the Dutch Leukemia Study, the Leukemia Study of the Northern Countries, two leukemia studies in Germany, etc. For the osteosarcomas

Swiss calculate costs of smoking

The Swiss Federal Office of Public Health recently released a survey concerning the cost of smoking to Swiss society. The burden was calculated to be about US$6.5 billion each year. Approximately one-third of Switzerland's population of seven million are smokers. The survey also shows that about 40% of those in the 20–24 age group smoke and that cigarette smoking is particularly prevalent among teenagers, especially girls.

The report calculates medical and hospital expenses for the treatment of 15 illnesses directly related to tobacco. Figures are also given for lost productivity as well as its effects on families and society in general. It should be noted that the estimates did not take into account the economic burden of passive smoking. Projected for the European Union, where the prevalence of smoking is in general quite similar, these figures would amount to an annual cost of more than US$300 billion. The tobacco industry reacted angrily to the report, claiming that it was of "doubtful scientific accuracy" (Lancet 1998; 352: 797). Tobacco lobbyists were also claiming that the report was essentially aimed at ensuring increased funding for the government's anti-tobacco campaign. In fact, in a significant turnabout, the Swiss government, until now apparently indifferent to the issue, has decided to deal with the problem more energetically (Ann Oncol 1998; 9 (4): 347).

Awards, appointments

In October Wolfgang Hiddemann, MD, PhD, since 1992 Head of the Department of Hematology/Oncology,