

Foreword

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The Symposium published on the following pages may in time become for investigators the first fascicle of an ongoing record of progress in cancer research. The history of this undertaking deserves mention at this time because of its somewhat novel conception.

Early in 1955, the Board of Directors of the American Cancer Society directed the creation of a Scientific Review Committee¹ to be composed of experienced investigators from the varied scientific disciplines engaged in cancer research. The task assigned the Committee was a broad and exacting one. It was asked to meet periodically to ponder such questions as: What is the current status of scientific knowledge about cancer? Are there significant but as yet unrecognized correlations pertinent to cancer that can be gleaned from present scientific knowledge through an interdisciplinary approach? Are there important leads which could be but are not being fully exploited? Should activity be intensified in any specific area of cancer research? Conversely, is undue emphasis being placed on avenues of investigation which no longer appear fruitful?

To those scientists who would view the creation of this committee and the propounding of these questions as the progeny of a marriage of haste and naiveté, I should point out that the Society's Board of Directors is fully aware that the extent of progress at any given moment cannot be assessed accurately until after the problem of cancer has been finally solved. Yet the Board would consider itself as being derelict if it did not ask continuously, "Where do we seem to be today, and where should we try to go tomorrow?" True, our answers to these questions today may tomorrow, in retrospect, appear ridiculous. Nevertheless, only in this way can the germ of further progress be vitalized and can we visualize the thread of significance in the published accounts of research on cancer

¹ Doctors I. Berenblum, Austin M. Brues (absent), Philip P. Cohen, Francisco Duran-Reynals, William U. Gardner, Alfred Gellhorn, Alexander Haddow (absent), Charles Huggins, Antoine Lacassagne (absent), Charles M. Pomerat, Van R. Potter, C. P. Rhoads, Jack Schultz, Michael B. Shimkin (absent), Wendell M. Stanley, Paul E. Steiner, and Edward L. Tatum.

which constitute, according to Greenstein (1), "a monstrous and amorphous literature, controversial, often hastily ambitious, and frequently haunted by the ghosts of countless once hopeful and dazzling hypotheses."

The mechanism adopted by the Scientific Review Committee for discharging its responsibilities is a series of informal conferences, each dealing with a selected area of cancer research. Different groups of experts will be invited to participate with the Committee in each conference. By this device the Committee will be assured of a diversity and freshness of approach as it moves from topic to topic. Diversity of opinion, and the injection of new modes of thought, are further assured by the fact that no individual committee member will serve for more than three years. Initial appointments have been staggered so that approximately one-third of the membership will be replaced annually.

It has been decided to hold each meeting of the Committee over a span of 3 days, at a location well removed from urban distractions. Meetings are to be closed, in the sense that attendance is limited to members of the Committee, invited speakers, and members of the Society's scientific staff.

The topic selected for the first meeting was "A Critical Appraisal of the Biochemical Characteristics of Morphologically Separable Cancers." Various aspects of this topic were assigned to members of the Committee or to invited guests; a second person was asked to prepare a formal discussion of each presentation. The principal papers were completed and distributed to all participants well before the meeting. This enabled the scheduled discussants to draft considered statements and made it possible for all participants to be thoroughly familiar in advance with the contents of the principal papers.

When the Committee convened, the principal speakers gave brief recapitulations of their papers, each followed by the formal scheduled discussion. Then ensued what turned out to be by far the most valuable part of the meeting; a lively informal discussion.

In the pages that follow will be found the formal

papers and discussions, and also summaries of the informal discussions prepared by the presiding officer of each day. Admittedly the written word tends to stress areas of substantial agreement and hence can never be so stimulating as informal discussions which touch on areas furthest in the forefront of scientific advance, where disagreement rather than agreement prevails. It is regrettable that more persons could not have actually heard this conference. But a larger group would have militated against candid and forthright discussions. As a practical compromise, the highlights of the discussion are presented here.

Perhaps this record may serve to point out some

of the stumbling blocks now before us. Certainly many of the participants were agreeably surprised at the stimulating differences of opinion expressed. Possibly, they were also surprised, although not pleasantly, at the lack of understanding among individuals approaching an identical problem from different scientific disciplines.

Future conferences of this type will be held from time to time. It is hoped that the proceedings of these other conferences will also be published in the pages of *Cancer Research*.

REFERENCES

1. GREENSTEIN, J. P. *Biochemistry of Cancer*. 2d ed. New York: Academic Press, Inc., 1954.