



Introduction

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THE MAIN incentive for organising this first international congress "*From Gene to Cure*" was the 15th anniversary of the comprehensive cancer centre in Amsterdam. The Dutch comprehensive cancer centres (CCC) are rather unique cancer-related organisations. Their main goals are to optimise patient treatment and care while leaving the patient in his natural environment; advancement of prevention and early cancer detection; and stimulation of oncological research. The activities of such CCCs relate to the support of oncological workgroups and the realisation of consultancy services. Each consultancy team consists of a medical oncologist, a surgeon and a radiotherapist. The team regularly meets the oncology committees in the various hospitals. Other goals of the CCCs are the organisation of clinical trials and data management, tumour registration, stimulation of early cancer detection programmes, to mention but a few.

The organisation of this first international congress "*From Gene to Cure*" was based upon a close collaboration between the Comprehensive Cancer Centre, Amsterdam, the European Cancer Centre and the European Postgraduate Gastro-Surgical School in Amsterdam. The organisational scientific body consisted of delegates from the three major clinical Amsterdam units, that is, the National Cancer Institute (Professor Borst and Dr Bartelink), the Free University (Professor Pinedo and Dr Peters) and the University of Amsterdam (Professor Obertop and Professor Offerhaus).

Colorectal cancer was chosen as the first topic of, hopefully, a long series of multidisciplinary updates on malignancy. Many aspects of colorectal cancer are currently in the forefront of basic and clinical investigation. Of fundamental importance are the timely studies of the genetic aberrations that occur in colorectal cancer. Indeed, the pioneering work of Dr Vogelstein and his team from Johns Hopkins in Baltimore, U.S.A. is beyond doubt one of the most important achievements in our understanding of the molecular genetic aberrations in colorectal carcinogenesis.

The pioneering work of the Baltimore team not only led to gradual unmasking of the complex sequential interactions of genetic mutations, but indirectly led to studies related to cell metabolism and cell kinetics. Obviously, those areas were extensively discussed at the conference, as can be judged from the many manuscripts published in the initial chapters of these proceedings.

Equally important are studies on the environmental factors that contribute to colorectal carcinogenesis. The role of adenoma in the adenoma-cancer sequence and the perplexing problems of the "flat adenoma" and the "flat adenocarcinoma" are of vital importance with respect to early detection of premalignant and early malignant lesions.

The overall success of this congress was largely due to its multidisciplinary nature. The various therapeutic modalities, such as chemotherapy and immunotherapy, surgery and radiotherapy were extensively discussed. In particular, the current chemotherapeutic modalities were scrutinised in depth with respect to overall significance and shortcomings. The same can be said for immunotherapy. All aspects of current surgical procedures, including the new laparoscopic approaches, were critically analysed by world experts. Equally in-depth current radiotherapeutic modalities and outcomes were evaluated.

The final part of these proceedings is dedicated to future developments which can be anticipated in chemotherapy, surgery and radiotherapy. Again the multimodality approach is readily obvious. Such an approach will be increasingly necessary to advance our knowledge of colorectal carcinogenesis and to improve our therapeutic possibilities.

The organisers hope that these proceedings will be helpful as state-of-the-art documentation of where we are and where we are heading in colorectal cancer research. May its content contribute to the benefit of the patients for whom we care. The success of this first meeting "*From Gene to Cure*" would not have been possible without the dedicated assistance and professional help of Willeke Heijbroek-de Clercq, Roger de Boer from the Amsterdam Comprehensive Cancer Centre, Natasja Jansen-Lutz from the European Cancer Centre and Helma Stockmann from the European Postgraduate Gastro-Surgical School.

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