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Edited by Michael Allwood, Andrew Stanley and Patricia Wright, **The Cytotoxics Handbook**

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The field of cancer chemotherapy goes back a long time, yet it remains one of the most promising and challenging avenues for cancer management. In current clinical practice, chemotherapy is administered as an adjunct to surgical operation, or in the case of inoperable cancers such as leukaemia, as the primary therapeutic regime. From experience, it is usually a fairly time-consuming and tricky task to dig up information regarding a certain cytotoxic agent from textbooks or even research papers, which tend to look at a very specific aspect of such an agent and be burdened with jargon. In contrast, even at a first glance, *The Cytotoxics Handbook* was a rather easy read. As one reads further and further into this text, it becomes evident that the text is set up very clearly, and that a good degree of effort has gone into ensuring that the reader is able to extract relevant and valuable information quite easily.

The Cytotoxics Handbook is geared to be of significant worth to a wide variety of medical and research personnel. Firstly, healthcare workers such as nurses, clinicians and pharmacists will gain valuable insight into the action and toxicity of drugs that they are commonly exposed to in the workplace. Ways to handle, document, audit usage of, administer, and manage complications due to these drugs are an important part of this textbook. Secondly, it is a great reference tool for medical research scientists examining the effects of these drugs (and derivatives of) in cultured neoplastic cells and/or in studies using in-vivo cancer models. Aside from research scientists, it is a great reference tool for both undergraduate and postgraduate students studying within the areas of cancer therapy, pharmacy and pharmacy practice.

While a great deal of research work has already gone into meticulously characterising the pharmacokinetics and pharmacodynamics of chemotherapeutics in general, a trend that has developed in the past few decades has been to combine such agents with other treatment modalities such as radiotherapy, and even more recently, genotherapy. The advent of more sophisticated molecular biological tools and the recent interest in the Human Genome Se-

quencing Project will surely inject more efficient ways of synthesising, testing and marketing target-specific drugs in future. A lot of the old drugs such as cisplatin are being re-evaluated, specifically in the target gene or protein they affect in cells in culture and more importantly in-vivo. Thus, *The Cytotoxics Handbook* will maintain its usefulness in the years to come in light of the above comments and as such, it remains a treasure chest for pharmaceutical companies. It has figures for each agent and select degradation pathways, important information for the novice research scientist. Lastly, it may prove to be a jewel of a resource to a patient, or relatives and friends thereof, of neoplastic disease whether they have commenced on a chemotherapeutic regimen or are contemplating what treatment mode to select.

The central beauty of this text is the compendium of monographs on injectable chemotherapeutic agents in clinical use. Information on each drug pertains to the preparation, stability during storage, administration and disposal of unused drugs. This format has been used to minimise the time required to search for and interpret data on each agent. The author responsible for each agent is named (and email and snail-mail addresses provided) and the editors (contact details provided also) assure that these writers can be consulted on specific queries pertaining to their respective scripts. The text is updated to September, 2001.

The format of the text is a very reader-friendly one, with ample figures depicting things such as airflow isolators used for safely handling drugs and implantable pumps for drug infusion. Several tables listing such issues as chemical methods for degrading antineoplastic drugs and types of hypersensitivity reactions due to drugs also add to the high quality of the manual. All sections end with a list of the most relevant references, which is useful for the meticulous reader. The 'Contents' and 'Index' pages are adequate for quick cross-referencing. In summarising, I found this book a pleasure to read with the material being very accessible. One of its strong aspects surely is the fact that it can be used by both pharmacy-related personnel as well as lay people due to its straightforward and non-jargon-laden format.

Dr Crispin R Dass has been involved in the area of cancer chemotherapy, drug delivery and genotherapy for the past 7 years. He is currently at Johnson and Johnson Research, Sydney, where he is engaged in research into treatment for various manifestations of cancer.