

Foreword

In the series of seminars devoted to pertinent questions in oncology the 1989 year's seminar focused on advanced breast cancer.

Presentations of basic research in tumour biology and drug pharmacodynamics formed the basis for the discussions of established and emerging therapeutic modalities. The major part of the seminar was devoted to treatment. It is obvious that all kinds of treatment today must be considered as palliative. Even intensive treatment such as high doses of cytotoxic drugs combined with autologous bone marrow transplantation has not been proved to prolong survival.

The present efforts in treatment of advanced breast cancer are concentrated on finding ways to improve local control and optimal schedules for systemic therapy. It is, however, obvious that many treatment procedures have never undergone rigorous testing and also that we need better evaluation methods. For the moment it seems unlikely that a radical breakthrough will be achieved by chemotherapy or hormonal approaches and it can be anticipated that improvement in terms of prolonged survival will be of small magnitude. These circumstances underline the need for additional evaluation methods and endpoints, which take into account the quality of life of the patients. With the treatment methods available today, endpoints related to quality of life may reasonably be the most relevant.

At the present time five oncogens have been implied as having a role in breast cancer tumorigenesis. They are cellular genes likely to have important functions in normal cell growth and/or differentiation. It is also assumed that suppressive genes have to be inactivated before the tumour cell can arise. The rapid development within molecular genetics offers some hope for future advances in detection and classification of breast cancer as well as of treatment modalities for both early and advanced cancer.

We are most grateful for the large amount of information presented at this seminar. The persisting questions about several treatment modalities presented here provide an incentive for further collaborative research and also for future seminars on these topics. The sponsor of this seminar, Farmitalia Carlo Erba AB, deserves the thanks of all of us for giving us the opportunity to learn so much in such beautiful surroundings.

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