



Monday March 9, 2009
11:00 to 12:30

Lyon Convention Center
France

CANCER: SMALL VICTORIES ARE STILL VICTORIES

Moderator

- **Lynn Faulds-Wood**, President, European Cancer Patient Coalition

Speakers

- **Hugues de Thé**, Professor of molecular biology, Hôpital St Louis / Univ. Denis Diderot, France
- **Thierry Philip**, Director, Regional Cancer Center (Centre Léon Bérard) of Lyon, France
- **Jean Marie-Lehn**, Nobel laureate, Chemistry 1987, France
- **Peter Boyle**, President, International Prevention Research Institute, France

Summary

- This session was aimed at offering an overview of some of the advances of these last years regarding cancer treatment and prevention.
- One of the main diagnostic roads to curing cancer are chemotherapies, which can be incredibly useful and efficient, but can also be extremely toxic for the patient and must not be used lightly.
- Other techniques are being developed such as biotherapies, gene therapies and anti-angiogenesis therapies so as to reduce the toxicity of the cure for the patient.
- These techniques are showing promises but are nevertheless far from benign.
- Some of the most promising advances in the recent years have been the development of targeted treatments, where specific drugs are used against specific types of cancer.
- Indeed, as research progresses, we are becoming more and more aware of the diversity of cancers such as leukaemia. The classification of these cancers has greatly evolved this last decade due to the advancement of science.
- Due to this better understanding, some cancers that once were deemed irrevocably fatal have now become partly curable.
- Nevertheless this progress takes time and in the case of one type of leukaemia took 10 years to go from mice to men.
- This comprehension of cancer specificities begs for additional research and patient tumour typing, which raises some serious health issues for states when typing and classification are done on an important scale.
- With these advances, we can all understand the importance of properly defining the patient's cancer, for fear of providing him or her with useless drugs in his or her condition.



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- Although these breakthroughs bring hope to patients, they also make us realise that we will NEVER have a universal treatment for cancer.
- The panel and the audience also stressed the importance of cost based research as providing a drug that no one can afford is as useful as no drug at all.
- For instance, a recent patent on arsenic for the treatment of a specific cancer has lead to insane prices for the drug when arsenic has been around for 2000 years.
- However, having the proper drug is not enough as the doctors must then apply it properly. This is where evidence-based clinical practices can truly help all patients.
- Based on the evidence collected from numerous cases, national and international institutions are able to devise guidelines for proper patient handling and treating.
- This information is key in helping the patient in the decision making process.
- Nevertheless, having guidelines is not enough and these must be implemented properly.
- This was clearly explained by Thierry Philip who demonstrated how implementation of such guidelines actually saved lives when compared to control groups.
- Based on such results, it was decided between 11 countries & patient organisations that there would be a sharing of the main objectives and guidelines but that the translation into real operational guidelines would be left to each country, to fit with each state's healthcare system.
- Finally, Peter Boyle helped us understand the utmost importance of prevention and screening programs, which allowed countries such as Finland to get literally rid of deaths caused by cervix cancer.
- The panel nevertheless agreed that guidelines are for rich countries, and adapting the guidelines to fit the needs and capabilities of poorer countries is a necessary feat.
- This difference just illustrates once more the importance of correctly identifying the types of cancers and investing there instead of placing all funds in the purchase of potentially useless drugs.
- Biovision can really play a role here as policy makers, scientists and pharmaceutical companies can discuss the price and availability issues of drugs.
- Indeed drug prices can be incredibly diverse between countries.
- As with all major issues, problems cannot be solved without the definite will of politicians; populations preferring to talk about false issues such as pollution and cell phone masts instead of the real ones such as tobacco and alcohol as major cancer risks.
- Moreover, the panel and audience agreed that prevention was often neglected by state authorities which need to improve on these issues domestically as well as help developing countries fend off the threats of tobacco industries which prey on their citizens.
- As a conclusion, the take home messages were the necessary ongoing war with tobacco industries, the critical need to limit doctor smoking and the importance of prevention in the case of cancer.



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Quotes

"Pharmaceutical companies do not define a price of a drug based on its effects but rather on how much the payer is willing to pay for it"
Peter Boyle

"In France, social security does not want to pay for prevention because they are a disease oriented system and a hospital system instead of a patient and GP oriented system"
Peter Boyle

"You try to kill the cancer before you kill the patient"
Jean Marie-Lehn

"Prevention is good once you know what to prevent"
Hugues de Thé

"Molecular typing is not easy but it is becoming more and more common in hospitals in France"
Hugues de Thé

"Implementation of evidence-based medicine saves people and helps the survival of the patient"
Thierry Philip

"30 to 40% of cancer patients do not receive treatment..."
Thierry Philip