

## Obesity-related cancers set to rise

In an interview for ECCO, the European Cancer Organisation, to mark World Cancer Day on Wednesday 4 February, Professor Kathy Pritchard-Jones, President of the European Society for Paediatric Oncology, said: "If you want healthy adults you have to start by making healthy children. The chronic risk factors for cancer in adults, such as smoking, obesity and diet, are habits that are established in childhood. If we do not do something about tackling how much exercise our young people take and how concerned they are about what they eat and their weight, we are going to have another explosion of cancers."

Dietary factors, physical inactivity, overweight and obesity are estimated to account for approximately 30% of cancers in Western countries, making diet and physical activity second only to tobacco as a preventable cause of cancer. This proportion is thought to be about 20% in developing countries and is projected to grow.

## Cancer cures rising - disparities have improved

A special issue of the *European Journal of Cancer* [1] estimates the proportions of patients who are cured of their cancer in Europe – rather than just surviving for at least five years after diagnosis – is rising steadily.

Geographic variation in the estimated proportion of patients diagnosed in 1988-1999 who were cured ranged from about 4% to 10% for lung cancer, from 9% to 27% for stomach cancer, from 25% to 49% for colon and rectum cancer, and from 55% to 73% for breast cancer.

For instance, the Czech Republic, Denmark and Poland had the lowest proportion of cured lung cancer patients (under 5%), while France and Spain had the highest (more than 10%). For colorectal cancer, fewer than 30% were cured in the Czech Republic, Poland and Slovenia but 49% were cured in France. In Finland, France, Spain and Sweden, about 73% of breast cancer patients were cured, while the proportion was less than 60% in the Czech Republic, Poland and Slovenia.

Professor Eggermont, President of ECCO, commented "For most cancers, survival increased during the 1980s and 1990s. There were big differences between countries; however, most of the largest increases in survival occurred in countries where survival was low at first, and this contributed to a reduction in the disparities in survival across Europe."

Eur J Cancer, The EURO CARE 4 Study. 2009;45(6):901-1094.

## The use of animals in experiments

Directive 86/609/EEC is 20 years old in which time an estimated 235 million animals have been used in experiments across Europe. More than 12 million animals are used in EU laboratories each year. The European Commission published its draft proposal for a revised Directive in November 2008. It contained many animal rights proposals such as a ban on the use of great apes, greater restrictions on the use of non-human primates and widening the scope of the Directive to cover animals used for basic medical research, education and training.

Following much lobbying from the pharmaceutical industry and patient societies such as ECCO, the Agriculture Committee voted on 31 March 2009 against many of the suggested changes. The animal rights lobby is dismayed, even though Mr Neil Parish, MEP, the parliament's draftsman of the proposals, says that the directive will result in improved animal welfare and sets the framework to allow the EU to move towards the goal of ending animal experimentation.

The proposed Directive will come before parliament in May, after renewed lobbying no doubt. Thereafter, the first reading by the Council of Ministers will consider both the original Commission proposal and the amendments. If the Council of Ministers accepts all the amendments, the proposal becomes law. Otherwise the proposal will proceed to a second reading.

## New vaccines

The EMEA in February 2009 approved the first intradermal (ID) flu vaccine, for the prevention of seasonal influenza in both adult and elderly populations.

Vaccination via the ID route involves the administration of the antigen into the dermal layer of the skin. Due to the high concentration of specialised immune cells (dendritic cells) in this skin layer and their ability to stimulate an immune response, ID vaccination provides direct and efficient access to the immune system. The new microinjection system provides simple, safe and reliable intradermal influenza immunisation. The fine needle of the micro-injection system has a length of only 1.5 mm, ten times smaller than standard needles for the traditional intramuscular route. Intanza/IDflu is described as convenient and user-friendly and should be available in many countries by next winter.

Sanofi Pasteur is also working on a vaccine for Dengue fever, the most widespread tropical disease after malaria, for which there is currently no treatment. A clinical trial is starting in Thailand.

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