ESPAC Satellite Symposium

The European Study Group for Pancreatic Cancer (ESPAC) founded in 1992 in Ulm, Germany, has grown steadily in membership since then. ESPAC has fulfilled its early promise to bring together leading clinicians of all specialties and scientists, to tackle what is probably one of the most challenging afflictions of mankind: pancreatic cancer. The ESPAC Satellite Symposium has become an important feature of the annual scientific meeting of the European Pancreatic Club (EPC), itself a major multidisciplinary force in Europe. The proceedings are of such quality in surveying the contemporary level of research and predicting positive future directions, that publication has been welcomed by a wider audience. In 1996 the ESPAC Satellite Symposium was held during the joint meeting of the EPC and the International Association of Pancreatologv (IAP) in Mannheim; the proceedings were published in the International Journal of Pancreatologv, the journal of the IAP. This year the EPC and ESPAC Symposium took place at King’s College, London, 10th July 1997.

Professor Hans Jeekel (Rotterdam) gave the results of the multicentre Dutch study of adjuvant radiotherapy for pancreatic and periampullary tumours. No benefit was observed for adjuvant treatment; this, the largest adjuvant study completed to date, seriously questions the widespread use of such treatment in the USA. These results also emphasise the importance of the ESPAC-1 European multicentre randomised study comparing adjuvant radiotherapy, chemotherapy and a combination of these, with observation. By May 1997, 350 patients had been recruited. With a revised target of 480 patients due to be completed in the next 12 months, this study will definitively determine the value of conventional modalities as adjuvant treatment in pancreatic cancer. Dr. David Cunningham (London) outlined novel approaches in other GI cancers which may be of relevance to future studies in pancreatic cancer. The importance of palliation was emphasised by approaches to pain relief by the Lund group and the novel concept of clinical response benefit highlighted by studies involving gemcitabine (Professor James Carmichael, Nottingham).

Regional chemotherapy, showing relative success in other tumours, poses particular challenges when applied to pancreatic cancer. Professor Hans Beger and Dr. Karl-Heinrich Link for the Ulm group, have shown remarkable improvements in survival in the adjuvant, neo-adjuvant and advanced cancer scenarios; this approach will be explored in the ESPAC-2 trial in selected centres. Molecular advances hold great promise for the future of pancreatic cancer. Professor Markus Büchler and Dr. Helmut Friess for the Berne group illustrated the potential value of molecular prognostic markers and Professor Nick Le-moine (London) the present phase of development of gene therapy. In addition to gemcitabine, marimastat, a general matrix metalloproteinase inhibitor, also shows considerable promise for the future. Since these agents have completely different modes of action (one is cytotoxic, the other a biological cytostatic) combining these in randomised controlled manner will be used as the basis for a large multicentre trial (ES PAC-C-3). The North Italian group of surgeons have undertaken one of the first controlled studies of extended lymphadenectomy in pancreatic cancer resection, indicating the need to assess this approach in future ESPAC multicentre studies.
Finally, the discovery of the genetic basis of Hereditary Pancreatitis, the recently described association between chronic pancreatitis and pancreatic cancer and the identification of Familial Pancreatic Cancer Families, has provided novel opportunities for determining the pathogenesis of pancreatic cancer. Even since the Symposium in July 1997, ESPAC has announced the establishment of the European Registry for Hereditary Pancreatitis and Familial Pancreatic Cancer (EUROPAC) to facilitate the discovery of additional mutations in Hereditary Pancreatitis and the gene or genes responsible for Familial Pancreatic Cancer. EUROPAC has been combined with that of the Midwest Pancreatitis Study Group in the USA led by Professor David Whitcomb, whose group discovered mutations in cationic trypsinogen as causative in certain families with Hereditary Pancreatitis.

We are grateful to all the members of ESPAC, to fellow collaborators and to the EPC for another successful Symposium and for their invaluable contributions to the development of ESPAC and its sponsored studies.

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Editorial