Introduction

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The first of these Conferences was held in the 'Santa Tecla Hotel' near Catania, Sicily, in October 1982. From that day up to the present, the participation of leading hematologists from all the world has been considerable, with particular contributions, during the last 4 years, to various fields such as cellular and molecular biology, but also diagnosis and treatment of blood diseases.

I am referring, for example, to AIDS: in 1982, research was just at the beginning, whereas today it is possible to demonstrate the relationship between the retrovirus strands HTLV-I, II and III and the acquired immunodeficiency syndrome on the one hand and some forms of T cell leukemia/lymphoma on the other hand. Then there are the techniques of hybridization and cloning, which in 1982 still belonged to the domain of pure biological research; subsequently they have entered the laboratories of clinical research, giving our knowledge of the nature and development of myelo- and lymphoproliferative disorders a great impulse.

The rapidly advancing field of biotechnology also includes the study of 'oncogenes' which – as you well

know – is indispensable for the fundamental understanding of hematologic diseases, their pathophysiology and their therapy. Yet another aspect is the study of cytokines or lymphokines and, above all, interleukins and interferons: their identification and the speculative interest shown in them in 1982 have in these last 4 years given way to a great interest in their biology and therapeutic applications. Finally there is the graft-versus-host disease whose infectious and immunological complications, well known in 1982, have today been made less dangerous thanks to the use of monoclonal antibodies and Cyclosporine A.

It is not possible here to mention all the other milestones that have been reached since 1982 in the biological research and treatment of blood diseases in hematologic institutions all over the world. I am sure that the papers presented in this issue will be a valuable and up-to-date guide for every hematologist active in the field of research and treatment of malignant blood diseases.

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