As early as 1910 – before the First World War – planning for the establishment of a comprehensive cancer center in Vienna was finalised. Such a center was an extraordinary conception for that time. The First World War with its economic and political problems however prevented the fulfillment of this intention. The pertinent correspondence and the prepared plans have become historical documents. Austria became a small country with seven million inhabitants, the capital itself with about two million inhabitants. Only after the Second World War was the conception of a cancer center taken up again by a few brave clinicians and in 1953 a very modest institute for cancer research was ready for work. This institute, at that time, was founded on a private basis by several institutions, but essentially supported by gifts from the Austrian population.

In spite of having no beds at its disposal from the very beginning, the basic conception of the Institute was, and always has been, closely related to the human cancer problem. Cooperation with many clinical units in Vienna, based on a voluntary level, was begun with enthusiasm. Out of this very modest beginning, step by step, the Cancer Research Institute in Vienna became a large coordinating center for cancer control activity in Austria. In 1969 the Institute was taken over by the Austrian Government and became an institution based on the general support of the Austrian Government. It depends now on the Ministry of Science and Research, is still aided by gifts from the population and is supported by foundations (Fonds Österreichische Krebsforschungsinstitute). This generous support has enabled the Institute to reach a comparable
The Cancer Research Institute of the University of Vienna

The basic concept of the Institute is having scientific teams working with different methods, (e.g. biochemistry, cytogenics, immunology, etc.), on the same objective and system in order to establish parameters from these different approaches for a localisation of the problem in a coordinate system. It took some time to bring these heterogeneous lines into close cooperation. Now, graduates from medicine, biology, and biochemistry are working closely together to find a general approach in the fight against cancer. The idea of having the medical staff exposed to the immediate results of basic research as well as of having the workers in basic research under the stress and pressure of the human cancer problem makes communication easy. This developing homogeneity in the work of the Cancer Research Institute has been well recognised by the country. The Institute has become in this way a reference point for many approaches in the field of cancer control.

By 1962 the Institute, again on a private scale, had started a population-based registry. Since 1970 cancer registration has been compulsory by law. Now cancer registration in Austria on a population-based scale with the participation of all hospitals is achieved by cooperation instituted by the Ministry of Health between the National Office of Statistics and the Institute for Cancer Research.

The activities of public education in the field of cancer as well as in the coordination of cancer campaigns and cancer control, are directed by a cancer board in which competent delegates from all associated organisations, such as the Ministries of Health and Science, the organisation of doctors, the Cancer League, and the health administration, etc. are involved. This board of cancer education is under the guidance of the Institute for Cancer Research.

Activities for identification and detection of cancerogenic factors in the distinctly Austrian situation are directed by the Institute for Cancer Research.

Attempts to improve early detection continue. The assessment of the effectiveness of tests for cancer as well as coordination in this field are carried out by respective working groups. For many years clinical trials of chemotherapy and immunotherapy have been designed under the guidance of the Institute for Cancer Research. Many clinical departments all over the city are cooperating in this field with the Institute.

As a routine approach, testing of carcinogenic drugs in many animal systems is performed. Contributions are made to the problems of the transplacental carcinogenesis as well as broad investigations in the active inhibition of cancer development in animal models.

It can be said that the Institute is incorporated into the international framework of cancer research activities. We are very hopeful that in future a comprehensive cancer center will be established in Vienna.

Vienna, October 1977

H. Wrba