Presentation of the development in understanding the surgical problem of proceeding in the treatment of breast cancer in women seems to be extremely interesting and useful first of all to doctors leading research teams and working out strategies aimed at a maximum improvement in the treatment methods. However, this may sometimes encourage frustrating conclusions that ‘nil novi sub sole’ and that the effects are in fact determined solely by the disease’s natural history and its syndrome diagnosed in every individual case.

On the other hand – while studying the tumour’s biological anatomical, and therapeutic foundations – young researchers do not usually go further back in their countless works on breast cancer than to decade-old source publications. Such an approach to the material available often leads to fruitless studies by taking no advantage of the hitherto development in oncological thought, and by being sometimes trapped by misleading paths which must have occurred at different stages of the decades-long investigation into this complex and multifarious phenomenon with its biological, technical, emotional, and social aspects.

This problem casts a good light on the question of the very roots of the medical profession, i.e., the history and philosophy of medical thinking as both a natural science and an art. It seems a fertile idea to review the different ways of approaching the problem throughout the recent 200 years. Attention must be drawn to the fact that the subject-matter has considerably changed too. Cases described by C.H. Moore (1867) and W.S. Halsted (1894-1921) as ones requiring surgical treatment are no longer treated so today, owing to a development in therapeutic thought which keeps sorting out clinical phenomena and modifying the way of thinking of doctors and their patients. It would be wrong, however, to opt for radicalization in surgical procedure, i.e., to give wide operations to small lesions. And it would also be wrong to adopt the principle of reducing the extent of intervention at any price for emotional reasons.

The reviewed book, written by G.F. Robbins et al., provides a telling justification of the necessity to use biological and humanistic rather than purely technical criteria, while recommending every particular surgery. In-depth knowledge of the breast cancer syndrome a complex one from the oncological point of view -, which the surgeon must inevitably command if he is to treat it successfully, is a sufficient justification for the existence of a group of specialized oncological surgeons, whose task is to wisely shape the system of recommendations and methods securing the best possible results at the expense of the possibly smallest physical disfigurement and psychological damage (within the selectively defined system of recommendations as regards the treatment methods employed).

The work by Robbins et al. The Breast, shows the above through the description of the long and difficult-way made by research and clinical experience in this field. The other works referred to in the book reorientate our thought from the desire to master the technical aspects of treatment towards the knowledge of its foundations and wisdom, which are vital in treating people.
Metastasis formation of human malignancies is a leading cause of death among cancer patients. While primary malignancies have a relatively favorable prognosis, dissemination of cancer cells can rarely be controlled. This was the reason why a meeting on treatment of metastasis was held in October 1984, in London. This conference was a second in a series organized by the EORTC Metastasis Group aiming at surveying problems and perspectives of metastasis treatment. The organization of the meeting differed from previous conferences, since papers were selected for presentation on the basis of quality of abstracts submitted. This volume can be considered as the proceedings of 97 papers presented at the conference. They represent an appropriate cross-section of current interests in experimental and clinical metastasis research. Main topics were: animal models, their sensitivity to surgical, radiological intervention or chemotherapy, the morphological, biochemical and immunological characteristics of metastatic cells, the role of prostacyclin-thromboxane balance, plasminogen activators, fibronectin. The future perspectives of control metastasis formation were also discussed with particular reference to gene cloning and rearrangement. The book is a very informative publication for all those interested in the biology of cancer cells.

Leonard Weiss Principles of Metastasis
Academic Press, London 1985
XIII +425 pp., E 52.- ISBN 0-12-742820-8

The book ‘Principles of Metastasis’ by Leonard Weiss collects the most significant literature available up to mid-1984 on the processes involved in the metastases formation. The authors have made the effort to summarize the main results obtained by experimentalists and critically evaluate how much of this knowledge really applies to the metastases occurring in human cancer.

The first four chapters deal with basic knowledge of the steps involved in metastasis formation. Particular emphasis is laid on the biochemical processes by which cancer cells penetrate connective tissue matrices, on the biophysical and biochemical phenomena connected with their arrest in the luminal surface of blood vessels and on intra- and extravascular events leading to the formation of metastases in tissues. Subsequent chapters review existing knowledge of the efficiency of the metastatic process, the mechanisms of metastatic patterns and the biological differences between cells of the primary tumor and metastatic cells.

The last chapter is more clinically oriented, dealing with the possible diagnostic or therapeutic exploitation of markers present on metastatic cells. The book is clearly written and should be useful to experimental scientists and to clinicians working in fields related to cancer research.

Cohen, B.I.: Effect of sterols and bile acids on colon cancer; in Newsletter of the National Large Bowel Cancer Project, vol. 6, p. 6 (Houston 1978).


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