International Union against Cancer Clinical Oncology

The International Union against Cancer prepared the first edition of this manual several years ago with the expectation that it would be revised regularly to reflect rapid advances in cancer research and treatment. The second edition is now available and has the underlying philosophy that medical students and general physicians should be familiar with basic aspects of cancer, with some details of the most common cancers and with a few points about the less common cancers. This is an ambitious undertaking, especially considering that this is one of the most compact general treatments of the subject and is actually a bit thinner than the first edition. This has been accomplished in part by eliminating the index, which may be acceptable for this type of volume. Also, some illustrations have been deleted. The manual is divided into three parts:

General Aspects, regarded by the editors as the most important part; Cancers of Specific Sites, and Basic Science Research of imminent impact on clinical oncology. Part III is quite brief and serves simply as a framework for appending some relevant references. Part I provides a brief overview of epidemiology, etiology, pathology, natural history and principles of diagnosis, staging and treatment. The discussion is, in general, quite relevant, but some specific comments should be made.

The remarks about hematologic effects of cancer (p. 48) are difficult to follow; in fact, there appears to be a typographical omission concerning bone marrow replacement by (cancer) rather than by ‘thrombosis’. The assessment of chemotherapy as being curative in only one or two rare cancers (p. 75) is excessively conservative; in addition to choriocarcinoma and Burkitt lymphoma, nowadays one needs to include childhood leukemia, Hodgkin’s disease, histiocytic lymphoma and testicular carcinoma in a growing list of cancers where the results of chemotherapy alone are so impressive that the burden of proof now falls on the physician who would say such patients are not being cured. These recent advances in treatment are, however, reflected in the discussions of the specific cancer sites within this manual, suggesting some uneveness in the writing and editing of the book.

In regard to supportive care the value of aspirin cannot be disputed, but a caution about its adverse effect on platelet function, especially in patients who are thrombocytopenic from disease or treatment, would be appropriate. Also, the addition of codeine to aspirin produces additive effects; the ‘addictive’ effects (p. 100) are more typographical than pharmacologic.

One cannot agree that the typical treatment of the choriocarcinoma is hysterectomy plus salpingo-oophorectomy; in most instances such surgery is not required and in fact successful childbearing following proper chemotherapy has been described. Within the past few years cisplatinum, hexamethylmelamine and Adriamycin, which are not mentioned in the discussion of ovarian cancer, have emerged as agents at least as active as chlorambucil; controlled trials have now demonstrated that combinations using some of these agents are significantly more effective...
than alkylating agents alone. The statement that serum or urinary globulins are ‘always’ elevated in myeloma should be modified since an occasional patient is a ‘non-secretor’.

Despite the points raised above, this text does manage to cover a large and complex field in a very small volume. For the most part, the summaries on general aspects and specific sites are accurate and appropriate. As an introduction and brief overview of the subject, it should succeed.

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