Recent Advances in AIDS and Kaposi's Sarcoma

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Recent Advances in AIDS and Kaposi's Sarcoma

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VII
Introduction

This volume is based on the Second International Workshop entitled 'Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) and Kaposi's sarcoma (KS)' held in Sorrento, Naples, June 1986, and sponsored in part by the Associazione Italiana per la Ricerca sul Cancro and the Cancer Research Institute, New York, N.Y.

AIDS frequently associated with Kaposi's sarcoma was first reported only 5 years ago. It might be by now considered the epidemic of the twentieth century with a high prevalence of lethal outcome and global distribution. The appearance of this new disease entity has created enormous sociocultural, psychological and economic problems in man in general and in biomedical fields in particular. The latest developments in the epidemic of this syndrome identify emerging aspects of great concern, such as 'slow diseases', 'AIDS-related encephalopathies' and increasing heterosexual transmission of the etiologic agent, the latter reaching peak incidences in several Equatorial African countries. The severity and complexity of the disease has given the biggest stimulation to the entire medical research community and at no time in medical history has so much progress be made in such a short time.

The identification of the etiologic agent - human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) - a human T-lymphotropic retrovirus, which has been mostly referred to as HTLV-III/LAV, represents one of the most significant steps in AIDS research. The discovery occurred simultaneously and independently in two laboratories, both avant-garde in cell biology and retrovirus research. Extensive epidemiologic data have established a complete profile on modes of virus transmission and spreading. While at onset of the epidemic it appeared to be a relative public health problem, restricted to only subjects of certain high risk groups - main routes of transmission of HTLV-III/LAV by intimate sexual contact or contaminated blood products - the alarming reports of spreading of the epidemic in Equatorial African countries mainly due to promiscuous heterosexual transmission, has placed this illness in the forefront of attention. The number of people affected is increasing and clinical syndromes associated appear to extend. The World Health Organization estimated that by now 5-10 million people are infected by HIV and recent epidemiologic studies are showing that as many as 50% of infected subjects might come down with AIDS or AIDS-related syndromes. Although great progress in understanding the molecular biology and mechanisms
of action of HTLV-III/LAV is advancing by the day we have presently
no effective and specific therapeutic agent to counteract the AIDS virus.
While tremendous research efforts are concentrating in unraveling the
modes and mechanisms of HIV infection - its cytopathogenicity - as well as
to identify specific antiviral drugs and a useful vaccine, the world but particularly
subjects of all known risk groups are looking upon these scientists
with great hope. These perspectives, however, will not solve the problem
alone. It will remain of equivalent importance to prevent virus spread by
preventing its frequent transmission. Therefore, strong educational
measurements should never be emphasized enough.

In this volume, updated information, mainly on a review basis and
latest findings, is reported by leading experts in the field of AIDS research
and care on multifocal aspects of the disease, whether from a scientific point
of view or from clinical perspectives. Selection of papers ranges from etiology,
epidemiology, immunology, histopathology and oncology to clinical
manifestations in adult or children populations as well as in Africa.
I like to thank the authors for their contribution to this volume as well
as the 'Associazione Italiana di Oncologia Medica' for help in the organization
of the Workshop. Moreover, I am grateful to Abbott Laboratories,
DuPont de Nemours and Wellcome Italia, among others, for their contributions
to the meeting.

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