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Preface

Every year, the ‘Unité de Concertation et de Recherche pour le Traitement des Affections cancéreuses’ (Discussion and Research Unit for the Treatment of Cancer Diseases) of Grenoble organizes a state-of-the-art
meeting on a particular theme of cancer research. Our 1987 meeting centered on tumors of the thymus, which constitute a group of disparate and rare tumors. Several teams have contributed to the clarification of the problems: we wished to gather them in order to ask them a number of questions; the fruits of their experience and thoughts are published in this volume.

After a few generalities, the four thymic tumor types, i.e. lymphomas, cancer of the thymus, thymoma and miscellaneous thymic tumors, were examined from an anatomo-clinical point of view. While the malignant Hodgkin and non-Hodgkin tumors, which had been treated in detail during a colloquium in 1984, were not considered, we dwelled on the problems relating to thymomas and thymic neoplasms. It seems necessary to come to an agreement on their anatomical and anatomo-clinical classifications, which, combined with clinical and X-ray findings, will enable one to establish a prognosis and the optimal treatment schedule.

At the first two therapeutical stages, surgery remains the method of choice, but pre- and postoperative radiotherapy is found to be an indispensable complementary measure already at the first stage, and becomes the main treatment at the third and fourth stages. The role of chemotherapy is gaining in importance: it can both slow down a detrimental course and constitute a preliminary step prior to resorting to other treatments.

This work mirrors the evolution of the thoughts of the various contributing teams and informs on what they consider to be the best strategy for the time being. Although no spectacular progress has been accomplished, no one has lost courage. The patients must be followed up over long periods of time, as their condition deteriorates over 10 years, 15 years and probably more.

Everyone makes his suggestions, but there is general agreement over the fact that in the present state of knowledge, multicenter studies become a necessity. This meeting will perhaps enable the participants to become acquainted to new colleagues and to set up collaborative studies including large series of patients, which would broaden their experience.

We hope that this book, in addition to the information it provides, will encourage scientific collaboration between the readers on this fascinating but still worrying theme.

R. Sarrazin