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Preface

This symposium was organized by Groupe de Recherche, Servier France.

It was held in Shanghai, People's Republic of China on May 10, 1997. There were over 300 physicians and other health care providers in attendance. The majority were primary care physicians and neurologists from mainland China, but other European, Asian, and American countries were represented. The meeting was cochaired by Professors Wang and Meyer. The scientific program was designed to initiate and plan responses to one of the most important public health challenges of the 21st century, namely the epidemic, worldwide, of cognitive decline and dementia among the elderly. This epidemic has resulted from improved survival and longevity among our aging populations with control of infectious diseases.

Understanding causes for accelerated cerebrovascular aging, and designing new ways to prevent them, demand urgent priority since they are of imminent importance, particularly in the People's Republic of China with its population in excess of 1.2 billion, but also in all Asian countries where vascular dementia (VAD) is the number one cause of cognitive impairments among the elderly (i.e. dementias due to cerebrovascular disease). The leading cause of cognitive impairments in the USA and European countries is dementia of Alzheimer's type (DAT) but in USA and Europe VAD runs second to DAT although VAD is often mixed with DAT.

The first three scientific presentations of the symposium, which are published for the first time in this issue of *European Neurology*, are by Professors Forette, Meyer, and Anwer, who discuss identification and prevention of cognitive decline related to cerebral degenerative changes

caused by risk factors for stroke, particularly TIAs which demand early diagnosis and treatment. These subtle degenerative changes of the brain, brought about by risk factors for stroke, appear to be responsible for cognitive decline and they often precede and may occur independently, i.e. in the absence of overt cerebral infarctions. It should be recognized that risk factors for stroke bring about cognitive decline, before VAD becomes well established, and the majority are preventable and remediable, particularly the major three stroke risk factors which are: (1) transient cerebral ischemic attacks; (2) systolic or diastolic hypertension, and (3) cardiovascular disease.

The two following papers by Professors Qin and Li review current concepts of potential therapeutic approaches available for prevention, treatment and rehabilitation of stroke patients to be considered and practiced in mainland China.

The two final papers by Professors Benzi and Allain review the latest pharmacological studies of almitrine-raubasine including summaries of recent evidence derived from clinical trials concerning the beneficial effects of chronic treatment with almitrine-raubasine. This combination appears to prevent and ameliorate age-related cerebral degenerative changes bringing about cognitive impairments as well as improving age-related neurosensory decline affecting vision, hearing, and equilibrium.