Looking at Cancer

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One of the most promising chemotherapeutic agents developed in the last decade is L-asparaginase, a hormone that inhibits the growth of cells that metabolically require L-asparagine from exogenous sources. The drug is particularly effective in acute lymphatic leukemia, inducing remission in 50 to 60 percent of patients. The remissions are short, however, making it essential to use other drugs in combination for effective therapy. W. W. Sutow and others (Southwest Chemotherapy Study Group, Houston, Texas) report on children with advanced, previously treated acute leukemia; in the study they were assigned randomly to one of three treatment schedules, one of them involving L-asparaginase alone and the other two combining vincristine and prednisone with it. The response rate for the three-drug combination was 76 percent, compared to 54 percent for L-asparaginase alone. The authors found it striking that second remissions could be induced in a high percentage of patients who had responded to first treatment, and that a number of these advanced patients maintain their remission status for six to seven months without maintenance therapy. B. G. Leventhal and E. S. Henderson (National Cancer Institute, Bethesda, Maryland) report the results of two studies combining asparaginase with other drugs. Both had to be terminated early because of intolerable toxicity. Useful observations on the relationships of toxicity to dose administration patterns are recorded.

A note of disappointment and perhaps warning about the use of cyclic combination chemotherapy in lymphoma is sounded by B. Mukherji and others (Memorial Hospital for Cancer and Allied Diseases, New York, New York). They evaluated a program of four drugs: cyclophosphamide, vincristine, procarbazine and prednisone in patients with generalized lymphosarcoma and reticulum cell sarcoma. The response rate was significantly lower than those reported by several other groups recently. Hematologic toxicity was severe and may have contributed to the deaths of four patients (17 percent). Several factors which may have contributed to the poorer results are considered, of which the high incidence of visceral involvement may be the most important factor. They concluded that the regimen did not appear to be more useful than conventional forms of therapy for disseminated lymphoma with visceral involvement, and that hematologic toxicity was a deterrent.

Methotrexate-rescue, a maneuver in which high doses of methotrexate are followed in 24 to 36 hours by leucovorin to halt toxicity, has been evaluated by the Southeastern Cancer Study Group. W. R. Vogler and J. Jacobs (Emory University School of
Menicine, Atlanta, Georgia) describe the chemotherapeutic results as dis-couraging and no better than reports of methotrexate given in more conven-ventional ways, but they do indicate a reduced toxicity.

What happens to patients who are cured of cervical cancer by radiation? Do they die of radiation induced cancers or leukemia? C. Zippin and others (University of California, San Fran-cisco, California) have been following a group of 497 such women, with a minimum follow-up time now of 17 years and a maximum of 36 years. They find no evidence that pelvic radiation therapy had a life shortening effect on women successfully treated for cervical cancer. No deaths from leukemia were found, although an internationally cited model for risk of leukemia induction from radiation would have predicted seven cases.

There is a group of breast cancer patients who are at high risk to develop cancer in the other breast. H. P. Leis (New York Medical College, New York, New York) defines this group; in general, they are women under 50 with a familial history of breast cancer who have an early multicentric, good histologic type of cancer in the first breast, and therefore, a good prognosis for long-term survival. In this group, he advises prophylactic simple mastec-tomy of the remaining breast, and reports 16 unsuspected cancers found in 91 such patients.

E. M. Chatty and K. M. Earle report on an unusually large series, 201 cases, of medulloblastoma. They call atten-tion to some important factors rela-tive to prognosis that are not generally appreciated. Histologically the desmoplastic type is associated with much longer survival than the classical type. Survival was remarkably better for adults than for children. Survival was also strikingly better for tumors located in the cerebellar hemisphere than for those in the midline. Regard-less of these differences in prognosis, however, most patients succumbed to the disease; only 7 of the 201 sur-vived 10 years. Four patients developed metastases to the bones, lung or pleura; it is not stated whether or not any developed spinal cord metastases, a point of interest to the therapist.

The Creative Man

*The image created . . . has led us to suppose that people of high originality are some-how lawless. But the truly creative man is not an outlaw but a lawmaker. Every great creative performance since the initial one has been in some measure a bringing of order out of chaos. It brings about a new relatedness, connects things that did not previously seem connected, sketches a more embracing framework, moves toward larger and more inclusive understandings.—John W. Gardner, *Self Renewal.* New York: Harper Colophon, 1963. P. 39.*