The Bicentennial
Cancer Research celebrates the Bicentennial of the United States by featuring Benjamin Franklin on its July cover, and by publishing some letters on cancer written by Benjamin Rush.

The bicentennial year marks two centuries since the first description of an occupational chemically-induced cancer—the scrotal cancer in chimney sweeps, recorded by Percivall Pott in England. Also, it has been exactly one century since the first successful, albeit forgotten, transplantation of tumor in animals was achieved by M. Novinsky of Russia. May the Tricentennial record the successful control of cancer!

Conference on Precancer
An important conference on “Early Lesions and the Development of Epithelial Cancer” was held in October 1975, at the National Cancer Institute in Bethesda, Maryland. The proceedings now appear, only eight months later, as a supplement to the July issue of Cancer Research. This conference considered the development of cancer of the urinary bladder, uterine cervix, liver, breast, skin, lung, colon, pancreas and stomach. As the chairmen of the various sessions concluded:

"...the development of cancer in all of these organ sites is a prolonged process, which may take 20 years or more in humans to reach its invasive stages. Before invasive malignant disease occurs, various preneoplastic changes occur in all of the above organ sites. Although these preneoplastic changes have not been generally considered as cancerous in the classical, clinical sense of the term, they are definitely an integral part of the process of development of cancer."

It seems obvious that if preinvasive stages of cancer could be identified and treated, mortality from cancer would be reduced, and by simpler methods than have to be applied to invasive cancer. In fact, it would be interesting to discuss whether the area represents treatment of preneoplastic lesions or prevention of cancer! This is already feasible to some degree in cancer of the uterine cervix and, to a more
restricted degree, in cancer of the urinary bladder. The approach is in its unexploited infancy for the internal cancers discussed at the conference.

The chairmen also stated:

"Greater effort must be devoted to development of new methods for detecting individuals at increased risk and to the development of more accurate diagnostic markers, both of which will make possible a more meaningful definition of the various stages of preneoplasia and their relationship to invasive neoplasia. It is not yet clearly known at which stages the preneoplastic process is reversible, and when it becomes irreversible..."

The six major sessions are skillful blendings of contributions from experimental and clinical oncology. Among the 40 papers and presentations there will be some of interest to all physicians as well as to oncologists. The introductory remarks and the analytical summary by Farber (University of Toronto, Ontario, Canada) are especially thought-provoking.

"Further research on approaches to prevention and control of invasive disease while it is still in the preneoplastic state is thus critically needed," conclude the chairmen. It is to be hoped that the National Cancer Institute and the American Cancer Society will respond, since many of the areas require programmatic strategies, involving national groups of investigators and long periods of observations. The first step, of course, is to separate fact from opinion, by long-term, quantitative observations on precancerous lesions, and on the results of treatment.

Send Us Your Questions on Cancer

We will refer specific questions in any area of cancer management to a leading cancer specialist. All questions will be answered and some will be published in Ca-A Cancer Journal for Clinicians.

Please submit your questions to:

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