A Millennium Goal for Cancer

In 2003, when Andrew von Eschenbach, director of the National Cancer Institute, set as a challenge the elimination of suffering and death due to cancer by 2015, many considered the goal elusive at best. Yet, in the effort to improve cancer treatment, researchers have seldom had concrete goals to achieve. Faced with the sheer complexity of cancer, the setting of concrete goals has consistently appeared imprudent and somewhat unscientific. However, it should be noted that in the year 2000, 189 heads of state from around the world set a number of equally imprudent and somewhat unscientific goals to be met by 2015. The aim of these objectives, known as the Millennium Development Goals, was to end hunger, provide universal education, bring about gender equality, reduce infant and child mortality, reduce maternal mortality, halt the spread of HIV/AIDS and other diseases, promote environmental sustainability, and forge a global partnership. As the world moves steadily closer to 2015, it is clear that although the Millennium Development Goals are still largely unattainable, major progress has been made. Thus, the setting of targets and goals can bring tangible results for insurmountable problems. For many years, the American Association for Cancer Research (AACR) has attempted to help the cancer research community identify obstacles, challenges, and important areas for study. In January 2010, members of the AACR Clinical and Translational Cancer Research Think Tank, with Raymond N. DuBois, MD, PhD, as chairperson, attempted to do this. The stated goals of the Think Tank were "to identify the most promising scientific priorities and opportunities in clinical and translational research that will advance patient care, to identify barriers to translational research and develop solutions, and to determine the strategies that AACR should implement to address the needs of the field and move it forward." This CCR Focus section reports the proceedings of that Think Tank. Three years away from the 2015 goal, so much work remains to be done, complicated by a global economic downturn. And yet amid tangible accomplishments in the last decade, there is room for hope. Guest Editors Raymond DuBois and Kenneth Anderson describe some of the successes, challenges, and priorities for progress identified during the Think Tank meeting in this CCR Focus series. The Editors have assembled a group of experts in the field to elaborate on different aspects, including Arteaga and Baselga on the impact of genomics; Parkinson, Johnson, and Sledge on the challenges and opportunities in biomarker discovery; Berry, Herbst, and Rubin on designing trials to investigate personalized medicine; Blasberg and Piwnica-Worms on imaging; and Kucherlapati on genetically engineered mouse models. As always, this CCR Focus series aims to stimulate those working in the field of cancer research, and to be accessible and interesting to those who are not.

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