

PREFACE

Many books have been written about cancer and many articles have been published on the history of chemotherapy, but none to our knowledge on the history of medical oncology, that is, the events that led to this new subspecialty of internal medicine, which was first established in the United States in 1972. As a medical oncologist, I had been thinking of writing a book on this subject and discussed the idea with Dr. Roberto Zanetti, Director of the Piedmont Cancer Registry in Torino, Italy, with whom I had spent a mini-sabbatical. He encouraged me to go ahead, despite my hesitations as I am not a historian. Before deciding to proceed, however, I first wanted to test the ground by preparing a set of slides for potential lectures. Zanetti kindly invited me, with the financial contribution of the Fondo Anglesio Moroni in Torino, to give a series of talks in Torino, Parma and Florence, Italy. All my talks were well received.

Serendipity being what it is, I had read a paper by Dr. Franco Muggia discussing the screening of cancer chemotherapeutic agents, an important topic in the early days of medical oncology. Muggia and I were members of the Eastern Cooperative Oncology Group; although we had no contact for many years I phoned his office in October 2009, to tell him of my plans. Muggia, the Chairman of the annual Chemotherapy Foundation Symposium, invited me to speak at its XXVIIth conference, to be held the following month in New York City, a talk that was subsequently published [1]. There were about 2000 people in the audience, mostly medical oncologists and oncology nurses of various ages. I then gave a similar presentation in Montreal on receiving the “Pioneers in Canadian Oncology Award” from the Canadian Medical Oncology Association. Judging from the comments received, I realized that the history of medical oncology was a subject of great interest and possibly a gap to be filled, at least from the perspective of the younger generation.

Since my talks included an overview of the history of cancer that preceded the first modern treatment of malignant diseases, I intended to gain access to the Osler Library of the History of Medicine at McGill University in Montreal. To do so

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conveniently, for instance to access electronic material at the McGill libraries from home, I needed a Faculty appointment at McGill University. For this, I owe sincere thanks to Dr. Phil Gold, Professor of Physiology and Oncology at McGill University, who kindly arranged for me to be granted an appointment in the Department of Medicine.

At the same time, I had the chance to interview or talk on the phone to the pioneers who laid the foundations of medical oncology. A large part of this book relates their recollection of key events.

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REFERENCE

- [1] Band PR. The birth of the subspecialty of medical oncology and examples of its early scientific foundations. *J Clin Oncol* 2010; 28:3653-8.