National Society Meetings

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53rd Annual Meeting of the Italian Cancer Society
“Back to the Future” Translating cancer research from bedside to bench and back

Torino, 19 -22 October 2011

The 53rd Annual Meeting of the Italian Cancer Society (SIC) “Back to the Future” was successfully held in Turin, from October 19th to 22nd (2011). The event was coordinated by Silvia Giordano, a researcher of the University of Torino (IRCC, Candiolato Italy) supported by the SIC president Alfredo Fusco, SIC board members and the local committee. 350 people attended the meeting.

The opening lecture, entitled “Targeting K_Ras oncogenic signalling in cancer”, was given by Dr. M. Barbacid (CNIO, Madrid) and the closing lecture, entitled “Deconstructing the molecular genetics of human cancer and its therapeutic implications” was given by Pier Paolo Pandolfi.

The first session, dedicated to LUNG CANCER, was a comprehensive overview of the principal themes and issues related to the diagnosis and treatment of Lung Cancer and included three main lectures on relevant topics. The opening presentation, given by Prof. Scagliotti, was centered on the clinical relevance of the “oncogenic addiction” as the main determinant of treatment efficacy. Dr. M. Sos presented more experimental data on FGFR1 amplification, which showed good predictive value of response to FGFR inhibitors in mouse xenografts models. Dr. Dragani closed the session with his lecture on genetic predisposition to lung cancer.

In the BREAST CANCER session Salvatore Pece presented data supporting the notion that the phenotypical and molecular heterogeneity of human breast cancers is a function of their cancer stem cell content. Sabine Riethdorf described the advantage of studying circulating tumour cells both as a marker of tumour burden and a source of tumour cells to which molecular analyses could be applied. Christos Sotiriou discussed the usefulness of gene expression profiling to identify predictive signatures. Ashok Venkitaraman illustrated his new findings on the BRCA1 and BRCA2 tumour suppressors. Elda Tagliabue discussed how understanding mechanisms of Trastuzumab action may help to optimise treatment choices in HER2-positive breast carcinoma patients.

In the SYSTEM BIOLOGY session John Quakenbush contributed a talk that focused on the development of data integration strategies in the post genomic era. Yosef Yarden (sponsored by EACR) discussed the modular hubs and the network dynamics features sustaining EGFR and HER2 activities. Filippo Menolascina concluded the symposium by describing methods to optimise in-vitro experiments.
The session dedicated to HAEMATOLOGICAL ONCOLOGY was opened by the presentation of Francesco Grignani, who focused on the role of epigenetics in haematological malignancies. Mario Boccadoro reviewed the complex pathogenesis of multiple myeloma and primary molecular translocations as therapeutic targets. He discussed the new ways into therapy, such as lenalidomide and bortezomib and their use in combination with standard chemotherapy and as maintenance therapy to improve patient survival. Giuseppe Saglio reviewed the molecular pathogenesis and the clinical features of chronic myeloid leukaemia. Saglio also pointed out that, although stem cell transplant (SCT) remains an important and potentially curative option, favourable response rates and tolerability achieved with tyrosine kinase inhibitors (TKIs) have resulted in SCT being increasingly reserved for patients who have failed on TKIs and for those who have progressed to advanced phases.

The NEW TARGETS session, a joint meeting with the Pharmaceutical Industry, focused on the critical pathways for cancer development such as those regulated by the kinases RET, MET, RAF and MEK and presented updated clinical data on new drugs against those targets. Massimo Santoro, whose research group cloned RET several years ago, showed that Vandetanib - an oral inhibitor of RET, VEGFR, and EGFR signalling - demonstrated therapeutic efficacy in a phase III trial of patients with advanced Medullary Thyroid Cancers. Paolo Comoglio, presented recent data on the upregulation of the MET oncogene by radiotherapy through the ATM-NF-κB signalling pathway, demonstrating how drugs targeting MET increase tumour cell radiosensitivity and prevent radiation-induced invasiveness. F. Sertzen from Roche presented the result from a randomised, multicentre, double-blind Phase II study demonstrating the improvement in progression-free survival in pretreated-advanced non-small cell lung cancer patients, treated with an anti-MET monoclononal antibody plus Tarceva® (erlotinib) compared to Tarceva alone. Also the Non-ATP-Competitive MET Inhibitor ARQ 197 demonstrated anticancer activity in early clinical trials and new data from a global phase II randomised trial were presented by Dennis France from Arqule. Finally, Michele Milella highlighted the potential rational targeting of the RAF/MEK/ERK pathway at multiple levels, by using inhibitors of RAF and MEK kinases, based on preclinical data.

During the NEW PLAYERS IN THE FIELD session an overview of new possible targets was given, particularly focusing on the modulation of different features in the tumour cell. Giovanni Blandino exposed the role of the Hippo-Yap pathway in organ size control and tumourigenesis. Patrick Mehlen illustrated the role in cancer of dependence receptors, among which netrin 1. Experimental evidences highlighted that netrin 1 silencing is associated with inhibition of tumour growth and metastases. The implication of miRNA-specific aberrant expression in the pathogenesis of cancer, cardiovascular, immune-related and other chronic degenerative or metabolic diseases has grown in interest. According to George A. Calin another avenue of current research is the study of miRNAs not only in cells but also in body fluids, as their presence may represent a gold mine of noninvasive biomarkers in cancer. Adrianus HM Geurts van Kessel described the importance of epigenetic regulation in hereditary colorectal cancer.

The “Giorgio Prodi” Lecture, entitled THE FAST AS A PLATFORM FOR NEW DNA CANCER VACCINES was given by Guido Forni. The cutting edge of Forni’s current research on DNA vaccines to prevent and cure cancer is shaped by studies at a younger age.

Last but not least, approximately 265 high quality posters were presented throughout the meeting in plenary oral, parallel poster discussion and poster display sessions. Many of these presentations were from young and promising scientists. To acknowledge their contribution, several awards were assigned.

EACR awarded a prize to Dr. Sara Sessa for the best poster presented at the meeting. Dr. Anna Rita Cantelmo and Dr. Paola Romeo won the Piero Trivella award for the best poster. The Elena Cappannini award was assigned to Dr. Elena Quaglini.

Katia Scotlandi will be the scientific organiser of the 54th SIC Annual Meeting to be held in Bologna.
Full Details of our events and how to become a member of the BACR can be found at www.bacr.org.uk
The Turkish Association for Molecular Cancer Research (MOKAD) organised the second international cancer research congress with the support of EACR. We hope this approach will successfully carry on in the years to come.

The congress was held in Antalya, a city located at southern part of Turkey that shares a long shoreline with the Mediterranean Sea. The emphasis was on anticancer agents, which brought various aspects of the issue together such as new sources of anticancer agents, novel drug targets and leading-edge drug technologies.

Participants from more than 20 countries shared their ideas on these topics. Overall, the congress consisted of 23 lectures, 13 oral presentations and 74 poster presentations. One oral and poster prize were awarded by the scientific committee (GJ Peters, The Netherlands; PS Low, USA; A Westwell, UK; S Alkan, Switzerland; K Dimas, Greece; C Galmarini, Spain) under the sponsorship of EACR.

The "Oral Presentation Award" went to Archita Biswas and Aparna Gomes from India for their study on the cytotoxic and angiogenic potential of Najakase, a small protein toxin from Indian monocellate cobra venom. The poster award went to Nuray Erin and co-workers from Turkey for their study entitled “Substance P Decreases MIP-2 And SDF-1alpha Secretion from Cancer-associated Fibroblasts”.

In the opening lecture, Godefridus J. Peters spoke about the roles of prodrugs in anticancer treatment and new modulation strategies. Different examples from the diverse source of anticancer agents were brought up in distinct talks. Some of these talks were covering marine derived anticancer agents, Toll-Like receptor ligands and siRNA nanovectors as anticancer agents. Carlos Galmarini pointed to the oceans as an unexplored and vast resource for anticancer agents. In fact, clinical trials are presently underway with some of the marine-derived anticancer agents. Some of these agents show their effect by binding the DNA or affecting the cell membrane integrity.

Konstantinos Dimas discussed labtene diterpenes, natural molecules abundant in several families of plants and algae, possess anticancer activities with interesting cytotoxic properties as novel chemotherapeutics.

Philip S. Low talked about the use of ligands that specifically bind to the tumour cells by taking advantage of elevated folate receptor levels. By this way, it becomes possible to link these agents with various molecules for therapeutic and imaging purposes. Another way to exploit the differences between normal and cancer cells might be by disrupting the telomere integrity in cancer cells.

Marco Folini gave an insight into the strategies targeting telomeres which mainly achieved by telomerase inhibition.

Andrew D. Westwell talked about their study on inhibiting proteosome deubiquitinating activity, thereby treating breast cancer involving BCA2 overexpression.

Personalised medicine is becoming more and more pronounced every day and there are various different approaches towards the realisation of individualised treatment of cancer. Michael Becker talked about tumour xenografts derived from patients that might be helpful in selecting the most appropriate treatments as well as identifying new predictive markers. In the satellite symposium, Christian Sartori discussed a promising tumour chemosensitivity assay, ATP-TCA (also called Sartori Test®), which predicts the sensitivity and resistance profiles of tumour cells derived from patients’ tumour materials, therefore, allowing the selection of the most appropriate chemotherapy regimen.

Overall, the congress was helpful in taking a cumulative look at the strategies fighting against cancer. We are hopeful and determined to organise such events again and would be pleased to welcome an increasing number of participants at our next meeting. Last but not least, we would like to thank EACR for their sponsorship.