
Reviews/Analyses

International collaboration for the prevention of colorectal cancer*

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This brief paper describes the involvement of the World Health Organization in promoting international collaboration for the prevention of colorectal cancer, more than half a million cases of which are diagnosed every year. A WHO Collaborating Centre was designated in 1985 in the USA and the activities of this Centre have included the preparation of a series of six articles for publication in the Bulletin of the World Health Organization. These articles deal with primary prevention, risk and screening of average-risk individuals, as well as risk and surveillance of individuals with chronic ulcerative colitis, colorectal polyps, and heritable factors for colorectal cancer.

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Background

Designation of a WHO Collaborating Centre

In March 1985, the World Health Organization, recognizing the importance of prevention in the control of colorectal cancer (the third most common cancer worldwide), designated the Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center in New York as a WHO Collaborating Centre for Prevention of Colorectal Cancer. More than half a million new cases are known to be diagnosed annually (1).^a The objectives of the Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center Gastroenterology Service, in conjunction with the International Workgroup on Colorectal Cancer, were:

- (1) Collection, analytic evaluation, and dissemination of information on primary and secondary prevention of colorectal cancer.
- (2) Standardization of terminology, technology, quality control, and reporting of data related to primary and secondary prevention of colorectal cancer.
- (3) Participation in collaborative research development in primary and secondary prevention of colorectal cancer under WHO's leadership, including planning, conduct, monitoring and evaluation of research as well as promotion of the application of the results of research.

This designation of the WHO Collaborating Centre

^a Granth, H. et al. *Time trends in mortality from cancer* Unpublished WHO report, WHO/CAN/88.5, 1988

followed a series of international symposia and meetings on the control of colorectal cancer. The first meeting in 1979 in New York (co-sponsored by WHO, the American Cancer Society, the American Gastroenterological Association, the American Society for Gastrointestinal Endoscopy, the American College of Gastroenterology and the American Society for Preventive Oncology) brought together more than 100 scientists from 26 countries in North and South America, Europe, Asia and Australia, all having a strong interest in patient care, research and education related to colorectal cancer. As a result of this meeting, a comprehensive book on the primary and secondary prevention of colorectal cancer was published in 1980 (2).

The enthusiastic response of the participants led to plans for future interactions. At a meeting in 1980 in Geneva, in conjunction with WHO, a report on guidelines for screening was prepared and widely circulated.^b The group adopted the name of the International Workgroup on Colorectal Cancer. Further meetings and symposia followed in Washington, DC, in 1981, Nice in 1982, and Boston in 1983. Members of the Workgroup also organized a nationwide programme in the USA on colorectal cancer that had the participation of approximately 100 000 primary care physicians.^c The third international symposium held in Boston resulted in a series of papers published in 1984 and 1985 (3,4); the proposal to WHO for designation of a Collaborating Centre for prevention of colorectal cancer was developed after this symposium.

Activities of the Centre

Following approval of the proposal, organizational steps were taken to develop an international scientific advisory board with representatives from North and South America, Europe, Asia and Australia. At various regional, national and international meetings the members of the advisory board developed a plan to proceed in phases in order to fulfil the mission charged to the Centre. Phase I: the development of state-of-the-art position papers in primary and secondary prevention of colorectal cancer, analytically reviewing current data and providing recommendations for practice and research. Phase II: the development of standards of data reporting. Phase III: enhancement of identified research needs.

^b Report of the International Workgroup on Colorectal Cancer. Geneva, 1980 (unpublished).

^c Colorectal cancer: essentials for primary care physicians. Produced and developed by Health Learning Systems, 1980.

Articles for publication

Six state-of-the-art papers, which will be published in the *Bulletin of the World Health Organization*, represent Phase I activities of the WHO Collaborating Centre. These papers deal with:

- (1) Primary prevention of colorectal cancer
- (2) Risk and screening of average risk individuals for colorectal cancer
- (3) Risk and surveillance of individuals with heritable factors for colorectal cancer
- (4) Risk and surveillance of individuals with colorectal polyps
- (5) Risk and surveillance of patients with chronic ulcerative colitis
- (6) Impact analysis of primary and secondary prevention strategies.

Each paper was written by an expert in the subject and was revised by the scientific advisory board and international reviewers. Special efforts were made to incorporate leaders of trials as well as experts in pathology, biostatistics, epidemiology, genetics, nutrition and related disciplines. In addition, each paper and the recommendations were discussed at meetings of the scientific advisory board in the USA, Italy, Israel and the United Kingdom.

Although not all the advisers agreed on all the statements, these papers provide a consensus and recommendations based on the available clinical knowledge, natural history of the disease, clinical technology, and a rational approach to patient management. Future data will provide the basis for modifications of the present recommendations. The Collaborating Centre has also been active in helping to organize major public education campaigns in the USA in conjunction with the American Cancer Society and other groups.

Control of colorectal cancer

In the past, cancer control was based almost exclusively on treatment. More recently, we have witnessed the addition of prevention as a valid cancer control approach. The US National Cancer Institute (NCI) has now joined the American Cancer Society and the International Workgroup in issuing guidelines for the prevention of colorectal cancer. The NCI has noted that there has been a mortality reduction nationwide in the USA for colorectal cancer in spite of a rising incidence (5). The NCI has further estimated that if all available preventive measures were widely applied, an additional 250 000 lives could be saved from all cancers in the USA alone each year.

The wide dissemination of the series of articles

on colorectal cancer in this and forthcoming issues of the *Bulletin of the World Health Organization* should lead to a balanced emphasis on treatment and prevention for the eventual control of this cancer. Achievement of this goal will require continued efforts in research that will provide the scientific basis for effective implementation.

Résumé

Collaboration internationale pour la prévention du cancer colo-rectal

Ce bref article explique comment l'Organisation mondiale de la Santé participe à l'effort international de prévention du cancer colo-rectal, dont plus d'un demi-million de cas sont diagnostiqués chaque année. Un Centre collaborateur de l'OMS a été désigné à cette fin en 1985 aux Etats-Unis. Une de ses activités a consisté à préparer une série de six articles qui seront publiés dans le Bulletin de l'Organisation mondiale de la Santé. Ces articles porteront sur la prévention primaire et secondaire ainsi que sur l'évaluation des risque et la

surveillance des individus souffrant de colite ulcéreuse chronique ou de polypes recto-coliques et de ceux qui présentent des facteurs héréditaires prédisposant au cancer colo-rectal.

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