

7th International Symposium on Head and Neck Cancer

Highlights of the 7th international Symposium of the American Head and Neck Society, 18th -23rd of July 2008, San Francisco

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Summary

Organized by the American Head and Neck Society, the 'Golden Gate' to the newest developments in Head and Neck Oncology was opened on the 18th of July 2008, in the beautiful city of San Francisco. Around 2000 participants from all over the world and from all disciplines involved in the care for the head and neck cancer (HNC) patient, were welcomed by their generous American colleagues. A well elaborated menu of 405 proffered papers and

754 posters was preceded by a selection of high quality instruction courses and alternated with summarizing keynote lectures by opinion leaders in the field of HNC. At noon "lunches with the professors" satisfied the hunger of both the mind and the stomach of the participants. All proffered papers and poster papers of the meeting are freely available on the website of the American Head and Neck Society (www.headandneckcancer.org)

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The 7th International Symposium on Head and Neck Cancer was truly multidisciplinary and provided participants from different specialties (otolaryngologists, head and neck surgeons, maxillofacial surgeons, plastic and reconstructive surgeons, radiation oncologists, medical oncologists, radiologists, pathologists and molecular biologists) ample opportunity to deepen their understanding of each other's point of view on HNC. Otolaryngologist-head and neck surgeons for example, were handed the opportunity to focus on aspects of basic science, taking an instruction course in HNC molecular biology (DNA genomics, RNA transcriptomics, proteomics and the statistics needed to deal with the massive amount of data produced by current high throughput technologies using dendrograms, hierarchical clustering and heat maps). Another instruction course gave an overview of immunobiology focusing on antibodies (therapeutic antibodies against EGFR

or VEGF receptor, preventive antibodies such as HPV vaccination) and the role of cellular immunity in HNC. Moreover, the role of stem cells in HNC was further explored. It was hypothesized that these stem cells are more resistant to therapy and could explain the tumor repopulation concept. If this is true, stem cells may be responsible for distant metastasis in HNC patients. Another interesting instruction course focused on strategies to receive funding for all this expensive research in the USA. Furthermore, several "lunches with the professor" focused on new developments in medical oncology. During the lunch dealing with advances in systemic therapy in recurrent thyroid and salivary cancers it was learned that several new drugs are currently being tested in phase II clinical trials (e.g. vandetanib, sorafenib, amg706, ...).

In the surgical field, the most important novelty was the introduction of robotics. A round table debate and an instruction course were dedicated to this interesting subject. One of the main advantages of this

robotic approach is the possibility of true binocular vision in areas which are difficult to reach, such as the skull and tongue base. Moreover, robotics offer additional degrees of freedom using the robot arms at these distant sites. Pioneering work in this field is being done at the Mayo Clinic, the Mount Sinai and Albert Einstein School of Medicine in New York and at the MD Anderson Cancer Center where the technique seems to hold promise in the treatment of nasopharyngeal cancer recurrences. Another surgical issue addressed during the meeting was the recently popularized endoscopic approach to benign and malignant lesions of the anterior skull base. The meeting continued in this way at a strong pace for the following days, providing overviews of the history leading to the current state of the art in the different fields of HNC care (e.g. *Dr. Jens Overgaard* and *Dr. Vincent Grégoire* on radiotherapy, *Dr. Forastiere* and *Dr. Posner* on medical oncology), all this serving as a background to integrate the new research efforts evoked in the huge number of posters and oral presentations. The congress president, Dr. Jeffrey Meyers and the program chair, Dr. Ernest Weymuller, really have to be complimented on this very successful edition of

what can be called the largest international meeting ever on the topic of HNC.

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