

FOREWORD

Fifty years ago, led by President Charles de Gaulle, France set an ambitious goal by proposing the establishment of an international cancer institute under the auspices of the World Health Organization (WHO).

The International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) has, over half a century, shaped the face of cancer research. It has done so through the establishment of cancer registries around the world, through cancer epidemiology research, and through its training programme, which develops and nurtures cancer scientists. IARC has provided the indispensable cancer evidence base for WHO's public health work.

Fifty years on, IARC has become an essential organization. The membership of its independent governing bodies has grown from the five founding countries to 24, and the number of Participating States continues to grow.

IARC's activities span a wide range of research fields that inform global decision-making for cancer control.

Within WHO, IARC has a special place, as it is the only WHO body that conducts its own research programme and disseminates its findings to the world. It is internationally recognized for setting the agenda in cancer research and prevention.

I have every confidence that IARC will continue to grow and to help WHO intensify its efforts to decrease the global burden of cancer.



Dr Margaret Chan

Director-General, World Health Organization

ABOUT THIS BOOK

This book, published to mark the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) by the World Health Assembly in May 1965, introduces the reader to the origins and development, major research themes, and key scientific and public health contributions of IARC in its first 50 years of activity.

The first two chapters describe the events leading up to the foundation of IARC in 1965 and the general societal and medical context in which IARC operated at the time and continues to operate today. The next three chapters highlight the main contributions that IARC has made to the development of tools and infrastructures for cancer research. Then, six chapters outline IARC's key accomplishments in the identification of cancer causes and in cancer prevention. A concluding chapter explores how the principles and vision that have guided IARC in the past are more relevant than ever today, in spite of major evolutions both in cancer as a disease and in cancer research as an activity over the intervening five decades. The book is enhanced throughout by the inclusion of short quotations extracted from a series of interviews with some of the key figures from IARC's history.

This book is in no sense intended to be a history of IARC as professional historians might write in the future. Nor is it intended as a comprehensive, historical overview of all the specific research themes and related activities conducted by IARC scientists past and present. To them, senior and junior, to all the IARC supporting personnel, and to all the thousands of scientists throughout the world who have helped make the Agency what it is, an apology is due to the extent that the nature of this book – selective in topics, minimally technical in style, and (for this reason) only occasionally citing individual papers – fails to do justice to the extent and value of their work, the very essence of IARC. Rather, the book attempts to celebrate, by examples, some of the achievements made by IARC through its collaborative approach worldwide. The responsibility for the selection of those examples, as well as of the quotations from the interviewees, rests solely on the shoulders of the authors.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



[Rodolfo Saracci](#) first came to IARC in 1976. As an epidemiologist, he worked in the Unit of Epidemiology and Biostatistics, subsequently serving for an extended period (1983–1995) as the head of the Unit of Analytical Epidemiology. Since 2009, he has been an IARC Senior Visiting Scientist.



[Christopher P. Wild](#) arrived at IARC in 1984 with support from an IARC Postdoctoral Fellowship. After working as a scientist in the Unit of Mechanisms of Carcinogenesis, he served as the head of the Unit of Environmental Carcinogenesis (1994–1996). He returned as IARC Director in 2009.

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