

International Agency for Research on Cancer



BIENNIAL REPORT



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INTERNATIONAL AGENCY FOR RESEARCH ON CANCER

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INTRODUCTION



Dr Christopher Wild

IT IS AN ENORMOUS PLEASURE TO INTRODUCE THIS BIENNIAL REPORT 2012–2013, WHICH PROVIDES A SUMMARY OF THE RECENT ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE INTERNATIONAL AGENCY FOR RESEARCH ON CANCER (IARC). THESE ACHIEVEMENTS ARE A TESTIMONY BOTH TO THE PEOPLE WORKING AT THE AGENCY AND TO OUR GLOBAL NETWORK OF COLLEAGUES AND FRIENDS WHO ARE WORKING WITH US TOWARDS OUR COMMON GOAL OF REDUCING THE BURDEN OF SUFFERING CAUSED BY CANCER WORLDWIDE.

IARC is a research organization that gains new knowledge not only through research projects in epidemiology, biostatistics, and studies of carcinogenic mechanisms but also through the expert assessment of evidence, producing valuable information for the international cancer community and decision-makers in the areas of cancer burden, evaluation of potential carcinogenic agents, prevention strategies, and the classification of tumours. This *research-plus* role is possible only because of the place IARC occupies within the World Health Organization.

The unique nature of IARC is evident through the spectrum of activities covered in the current Report. It demonstrates the high scientific quality of the work emanating from the Agency and the direct relevance of our findings to cancer control and prevention. We are living in exciting times, with cancer research revealing tantalizing links between events at the molecular, population, and clinical levels. Notably, somatic alterations in tumours driven by environmental and lifestyle factors in turn directly affect the prognosis of the patient. The need for an integrated vision, from the molecular level to public health, means that the

interdisciplinary approach inherent to IARC has never been more apposite.

The Report also demonstrates that almost 50 years after its creation, the core mission of IARC – to promote international collaboration in cancer research – is more relevant than ever. This Biennial Report also illustrates how the continued response to that core mission has evolved in a marked and dynamic fashion since its inception.

This evolution is nowhere more evident than in the very nature of the partnerships that underpin so much of the Agency's work. It is reflected, for example, in the composition of its Governing Council. In 2013, it was highly significant to see Brazil and Qatar join us as Participating States, bringing fresh representation from two regions, Latin America and the Gulf States. This is a significant trend, reflecting the growing emphasis on cancer as a major public health problem worldwide. It brings with it rich benefits also to those countries who are already long-term supporters of IARC, as new international collaborations and viewpoints shed fresh light on national preoccupations and challenges.

The evolution of IARC is also reflected in the changing nature of many of its scientific collaborations. Growing research capacity in the low- and middle-income countries is providing innovative ideas, regionally-led initiatives, and exchanges of scientists between institutions. Strategic partnerships between IARC and regional cancer networks thus become crucial, as the Agency sets its own priorities in the context of those identified locally. This reflection increasingly highlights, for example, needs in cancer registration, evaluation

of interventions, and assessment of how best to implement the successful ones in national health care settings. In turn, this can bring demands for new types of scientific expertise that are needed to enable IARC to continue to respond to the collaborative opportunities of the future.

Finally, in introducing this Biennial Report, I return to the original vision for IARC to promote collaboration – to be a catalyst to promote the *fight for life*. While the 300 people working at

IARC provide a dedicated and talented foundation, the Agency is actually a far larger organization comprising a network of many thousands of individuals who come together under the auspices of IARC to achieve its mission. I believe that in this sense of partnership, IARC provides a prime example of what can be achieved through a strong, accountable international organization within the family of the United Nations.

JOHN HIGGINSON (1922–2013)

The International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) is deeply saddened by the passing away of Dr John Higginson.

An internationally esteemed researcher, Dr Higginson had a special place at IARC and was highly appreciated. In July 1966, Dr Higginson was appointed the first director of IARC and he played a critical role in shaping the then-nascent Agency. He served as director of IARC until 1981.

Born in Belfast, Northern Ireland, on 16 October 1922, Professor Higginson was educated at the Royal Belfast Academical Institution and at Trinity College, Dublin, where he obtained a PhD in biology in 1946 and a doctorate in medicine. From 1947 to 1949, Dr Higginson worked in the Department of Pathology and Bacteriology at the University of Glasgow, and from 1950 to 1958 at the South African Institute for Medical Research, in Johannesburg, where he headed the Geographical Pathology Unit and Cancer Registry.

His studies focused specifically on the role of environmental factors in the development of cancer and cardiovascular disease.

In 1958, Professor Higginson was appointed assistant professor of pathology at the University of Kansas Medical Center, and in 1961 he became a professor of geographical pathology of cancer at the American Cancer Society.



J. Higginson, 2005

Professor Higginson was a member of the Royal College of Physicians of London, as well as numerous scientific societies, and served on committees of the National Academy of Sciences and the National Institutes of Health in the USA, as well as the International Union against Cancer.

He was the author of numerous scientific papers, mostly on the geographical distribution of cancer, including cancer of the liver and gastrointestinal tract.

Dr Higginson passed away on 25 September 2013. He will be sadly missed by all who knew him.