Health Notes

CANCER AND THE IMMUNE SYSTEM

ATRI WILSON
OPTIMAL HEALTH PROGRAM
working from the inside out

Most cancers cannot be cured and scientists should look for ways to manage the disease, the director of the Centre for Evolution and Cancer at The Institute of Cancer Research has claimed.

"When people talk about a cure for cancer they usually mean drugs, and here things are more complicated. **Cancer isn't just one disease – there are hundreds of types**, and as we understand the genetic signatures of individual tumours it's becoming clear that each person's cancer is as unique as they are – so it's simplistic to talk about a single cure. "

Professor Mel Greaves, an expert in childhood leukaemia, said developing more advanced cures would only lead to cancer cells becoming more resistant to treatment.

He believes that scientists should focus on prevention, and stalling the disease once it has emerged.

"With a lot of respect to oncologists we need to get smarter," he told journalists at a press briefing in London last month.

"Very intelligent people who aren't scientifically minded think there must be a cause, there must be a cure and it's just not right. It's fundamentally wrong.

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Talking about a cure in terms of elimination is just not very realistic. There are some examples of it. Childhood leukaemia had a cure rate now of 90 per cent but that is an exception.

"There are a few cancers that are curable but most are probably not including the common carcinomas in adults. "We should be a bit more subtle. We should not try to eliminate the cancer; we should try to hold it in check."

Many institutions are attempting to find cures for individual cancers using increasingly advanced methods. They include ramping up the body's own immune system to fight the disease; personalised treatments based on the DNA of the tumours and gene therapies.

But Prof Greaves believes no therapy will work in the long term because tumours continue to evolve like all life-forms. He is a leading figure in the study of cancer evolution – the Darwinian process by which cancer cells mutate and diversify by natural selection within our tissue ecosystems

"You must have noticed that when you read reports about new target therapies, isn't it odd that they work dramatically, but three months later (cancer) is back with a bang. It's almost always the story.

"I would argue that if you look at the age distribution of cancers, most people are in the 60s, 70s and 80s. If you could slow everything down for 10 to 15 years, maybe 20, then that would be a huge advance. "It is wrong to think we need some fancy therapy that kills it. I think slowing it down is a much more interesting proposition. "

Source The Telegraph. London U.K. September 2016

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