

## Editorial

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### World summit against cancer for the new millennium: The Charter of Paris

*“Society, being in its nature a convention, it loves what is conventional, or what belongs to coming together.”*

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Think of coming together. In Scotland, the sign for the Clans to gather was a fiery cross carried from Glen to Glen by kilted runners; the Pony Express united disparate frontier colonies of the US; Napoleon perfected the heliograph to help co-ordinate his army's attack; carrier pigeons were still being used in the first great war. Consider, now, the forces which bind us increasingly together; powered flight has condensed international travel, cyberspace carries messages faster than thought and television allowed us to watch the New Millennium creep over us, with the sun, from the Eastern edge of the world. Although in one backward glance, most of English speaking humanity was united in welcoming the New Year in singing Robert Burns's song 'Auld Lang Syne'.

Given increasing international co-operation in both fundamental and clinical cancer research and recognition that delivery of care by a multidisciplinary team provides optimal results, there has never been a better time to redefine the battle against cancer. Voltaire captured the essence of this, “La recherche du vrai, et la pratique du bien, sont les deux objets les plus importants de la philosophie” – The research for what is true and the practice of what is good are the two most important objects of philosophy.

Professors David Khayat, Salpêtrière Hospital, Paris and Gabriel Hortobagyi, M.D. Anderson, Houston, Texas, with a committee of internationally respected oncologists, seized the moment and arranged a World Summit against Cancer, the focal point of which was signature of the Charter of Paris, in the Elysee Palace under the patronage of President of the Republic, Jacques Chirac.

The Charter has 10 articles – the preamble begins

“Deeply troubled by the profound and universal impact of cancer on human life, human suffering, and on the productivity of nations.

Committed to the humanitarian treatment and equal partnership of people with cancer in the ongoing effort against this disease.

Anticipating the rapidly rising tide of cancer incidence throughout the globe, in developed and developing nations alike.

Recognising the need for intensified innovation in all

avenues of cancer research, prevention and health-care delivery.

Believing that quality healthcare is a basic human right. Acknowledging that currently achievable improvements in cancer survival remain unrealised, due to inadequate emphasis on prevention, inadequate funding and unequal access to quality cancer care.

Certain that lives can and will be saved by increased access to existing technologies.

Aspiring to nothing less than an invincible alliance – between researchers, healthcare professionals, patients, government, industry and media – to fight cancer and its greatest allies, which are fear, ignorance and complacency...

We, the undersigned, in order to prevent and cure cancer, and to maintain the highest quality of life for those living with and dying from this disease, fully commit and hold ourselves accountable to the principles and practices outlined herein.”

This preliminary statement leads on to a series of articles, which finishes with a clear pledge for the future:

“Since cancer knows no boundaries, and individual countries cannot address the challenges of cancer in isolation, a new co-operative approach to research, advocacy, prevention and treatment must be established.

The parties undertake to develop unprecedented global networks and alliances to further the goals of this charter. They further pledge to ensure that the objectives of this charter are not abandoned after its signing, by:

1. Recognising the declaration by all appropriate institutions that February 4 shall be marked as 'World Cancer Day' so that each year, the Charter of Paris will be in the hearts and minds of people around the world.
2. Establishing standing committees that will produce annual reports, benchmarking progress against each of the articles of the Charter.
3. Forming a global network of advocacy groups to encourage grassroots support for charter articles within their communities.

4. Creating a global research organisation made up of leading professional societies around the world. This group will be dedicated to ensuring that current knowledge is shared across borders, research gaps are identified and promising areas are explored.
5. Rallying one million people around the world to sign the Charter of Paris by the year 2001, thereby showing their willingness to mobilize on behalf of those affected by cancer.”

France played host to the first World Summit so we could use that watchword of the revolution, “*Fraternite ou la mort*” – Fraternity or death, in our determination to forge increasing collaboration between different health sectors and different countries, or perhaps, more optimistically, as attributed to Talleyrand, “*C’est le commencement de la fin*” – It is the beginning of the end.

It would be ungracious to end this article without mentioning the excellent hospitality extended by the Mayor of Paris, Monsieur Jean Tiberi, who hosted a fabulous dinner in L’Hotel de Ville and President Chirac and his wife who entertained us at the Palace of Versailles, with excerpts of Purcell’s Dido and Aeneas

followed by dinner in Versailles’ long hall. All of us have attended conference dinners, in many corners of the world, but there was a magic about this that transcended the usual; whether it was the camaraderie borne of the enormity of the task ahead, the beauty of our surroundings or the emotions tapped by the service conducted in Notre Dame cathedral, all of us felt empowered. Perhaps, there is a role for other governments, showing their commitment to the Charter of Paris, to host similar events on 4 February, World Cancer Day, and allow researchers, healthcare professionals, patients, government, industry and media to build that invincible alliance to fight cancer and its greatest allies – fear, ignorance and complacency.

As Thomas a Kempis (book 1, chapter 25.11) put it, “*Memento semper finis, et quia perditum non redit tempus*” – Remember always your end, and that lost time does not return.

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