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123 QUESTIONS TO...



**Professor Alexander
Eggermont,**
General Director
of Gustave Roussy

How did Gustave Roussy become famous at the last Asco conference?

This conference is the most important for oncology worldwide. Every year it brings together some 30,000 professionals from all over the world. This year the scientific committee had selected 22 oral presentations involving researchers or doctors of the Institute, 7 poster discussions and 25 poster presentations. This presence emphasises our leadership in the field of targeted therapies and immunotherapy.

What are the assets of Gustave Roussy in the field of clinical research in oncology?

Leading cancer centre in Europe, the Institute, whose major strength is the total integration of research, has the advantage of being able to lead the whole chain of clinical studies within the hospital itself. Those of phase I make it possible to verify the harmlessness of a new therapy. The phase II trials follow, destined to determine the optimal dose of the potential drug, and any adverse effects. Phase III lastly aims to compare the efficacy of the future treatment with that of a placebo or an existing treatment. Conducted in a same place and by the same experts, this chain guarantees patients swift and secured access to innovative therapies.

New drugs are thus on the horizon in paediatrics...

Indeed Dr Birgit Geoerger, paediatric oncologist at Gustave Roussy, presented the promising results of two phase I trials (concerning dabrafenib and ceritinib). These successes demonstrate the relevance of the focus of our Institute since 2012 on swiftly adapting targeted therapies to children. ■

NEWS IMMUNOTHERAPY: ITS SUCCESSES ARE MULTIPLYING

An innovative treatment strategy, immunotherapy has now passed from the promise to the evidence of its efficacy. At the Asco conference, several doctors from Gustave Roussy shared their recent progress in this field with the global scientific community.



Stimulating the patient's immune defences so they can combat the cancerous cells themselves: this is the gamble of immunotherapy. A gamble almost won, and against an increasing number of types of tumour. Traditional treatments, such as chemotherapy, attack the sick cells directly, but do not always give the expected results. This is why researchers have developed this new approach.

Gustave Roussy is at the forefront in this field, as demonstrated by three publications in *Nature* and three others in the *New England Journal of Medicine* over recent months.

Dr Caroline Robert, head of the Dermatology Department of the Institute, is a spearhead of immunotherapy against melanoma. At the Asco, she presented the combined results of four clinical trials involving patients suffering from metastatic melanoma, the teachings of which will make it possible to better manage the adverse effects of one of these new treatments, nivolumab. Dr David Planchard, pneumo-oncologist at Gustave Roussy, and Professor Jean-Charles Soria, director of the Therapeutic Innovation and Early Trials Department (Ditep), have presented the details of a phase III study aiming to include 900 patients taken from various healthcare establishments. The doctors thus want to determine the efficacy of a poten-

tial drug, MEDI4736, against a type of lung cancer. They will also test the potential of this molecule in combination with another immunotherapy treatment, tremelimumab. Dr Andrea Varga has shown that a treatment already effective against melanoma could also benefit patients suffering from advanced ovarian cancer, in whom other treatments do not offer any improvement.

To push its research even further, Gustave Roussy has just launched a programme dedicated to immunotherapy, on the initiative of its Managing Director, Professor Alexander Eggermont. This programme has the objective of implementing new therapeutic strategies in clinical practice and providing a role of coordination and support to the different departments concerned. It should enable the Institute to position itself as European leader in immunotherapy of cancers. ■

FEMALE CANCERS

Breast cancers and ovarian cancers were the subject of two major Gustave Roussy presentations at the Asco conference. It should be stated that the former affects one woman in eight throughout her life, and the second, although rarer, is no less frightening as it is often discovered late and is difficult to treat.

Dr Alexandra Leary, oncologist within the Gustave Roussy Department of Oncological Medicine, has highlighted certain changes in the genome induced by chemotherapy which make the tumours resistant to treatment. This is therefore a major first step towards the adaptation of a new treatment to eradicate the resistant cells and avoid recurrences.

Dr Suzette Delaloge, also an oncologist within the Department of Oncological Medicine and Head of the Gustave Roussy Mammary Pathology Committee, is the principal investigator in France of a huge international study relating to breast cancer expressing excessive HER2 protein, making the cancer particularly aggressive. The study has demonstrated the interest of a new strategy adding neratinib, a treatment targeted against an enzyme itself acting on HER, to reduce the risk of recurrence. Two results that demonstrate once again the importance of an in-depth knowledge of the molecular and genetic malfunctions of cancers in order to devise and provide appropriate therapeutic responses. ■



Since the advent of the first targeted therapies some ten years ago, research has increased to update new molecules, apply them to other types of cancer, find new treatment combinations, etc.

Targeted therapies aim to block specific mechanisms of cancer cells, opening a new resistance against the disease. They have the advantage of sparing the healthy cells and thus lead to fewer side effects than the traditional treatments. The development of genomics techniques and the ever more in-depth knowledge of the genetic characteristics of tumours have enabled the discovery of specific molecular targets of the cancer cells. The targeted treatments attach, for example, to the angiogenesis: the ability of the tumour cells to develop blood vessels in order to feed themselves and grow.

At the last Asco conference, Gustave Roussy presented two major studies on

lung cancer. One showed the superiority of afatinib over another targeted treatment, erlotinib, in the epidermoid cancer of the lung. The other highlighted the good tolerance and efficacy of a combination of dabrafenib and trametinib in some patients suffering from "non-small cell" lung cancer.

As some targets are common to several types of tumour, targeted treatments developed initially against one cancer are now tested, and with success, against other pathologies. And new targets and treatments are born. ■

GUSTAVE ROUSSY AT ASCO: THEY ARE TALKING ABOUT US!



The presence and presentations of Gustave Roussy at the Chicago conference were reported in many media. Le Figaro, Le Parisien, La Croix, Le Télégramme, Santé magazine, Sciences et Avenir... The press widely relayed their scientific results and medical progress. The radio (Europe 1, France Info, France Inter, RTL) and of course the television, notably with the news programmes of TF1, France 2 and France 3, also gave the floor to the specialists of Gustave Roussy, such as Professor Gilles Vassal, director of clinical research,

and Dr Caroline Robert, oncological dermatologist, and to patients treated by the Institute. You can find many interviews of doctors and researchers on the Gustave Roussy website. ■

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