

***Clinical Oncological Society of Australia
28th Annual Scientific Meeting
Brisbane Exhibition and Convention Centre
Wednesday 28 November 2001
8.30am***

**The Hon Paul de Jersey AC
Chief Justice of Queensland**

I have great pleasure in welcoming you to the 28th Annual Scientific Meeting of the Clinical Oncological Society of Australia, and especially those of you who hail from outside the State of Queensland. It is itself significant that the conference is in its 28th year. COSA has an established and proud tradition of bringing health professionals from multiple disciplines into an educational forum characterised by critical inquiry into cancer research and patient care.

The past history of imaginative programming and diverse presentations from the multiple contributing disciplines has produced interactive Annual Scientific Meetings of the highest quality. The Programme and Organizing Committee of this year's meeting has set the goal, once again, of presenting an innovative program. I warmly congratulate the Committee in confident anticipation of its achieving that goal.

It is a particular personal pleasure for me to have the opportunity to open the Conference. While I was a member of the Council of what was then called the Australian Cancer Society, I came to understand sufficient of the role of COSA to appreciate its value to the people of Australia. I was also of course privileged to meet many engaging clinical oncologists. The last Brisbane conference was opened by a lawyer, a previous State Governor. I am professionally pleased that you have again selected a lawyer to fill this role!

The medical and legal professions are necessarily close. Medical negligence litigation of itself ensures that. Indeed, as recently as this last weekend, I participated in a meeting at Noosa of the Queensland Medico Legal Society, now in its 50th year – at which, unsurprisingly, there was much discussion of recent decisions of the High Court of Australia. But necessity aside, our professions are united by their orientations, in each case directed towards service of the public, and, I believe, through a mutual fascination about each other’s particular professional approach. But I digress!

The theme of this year’s conference, “From Global to Local”, focuses on the globalisation which so preoccupies the world today. Our world is changing, not just because the electronic revolution has replaced individual endeavour in many traditional areas of employment, but also because the human struggle to survive and prosper now depends upon the acquisition of a new source of wealth. It is information, rapidly transmitted and of increasing complexity, which now creates wealth and value. For developed countries, the challenge is to neutralize uncertainty and anxiety, and to grasp the new mantra of knowledge in order to ensure economic progress and social prosperity for all.

The challenge for the health care system, and for the COSA community of oncology professionals, is to understand the implications of globalisation and harness its technologies with a view to improving patient outcomes. This year's meeting will examine the new technologies driving communication and computation, through a series of plenary sessions and symposia.

The impact of globalisation is demonstrably evident in the structure and function of health care policies. In most western societies, governments have addressed national agendas and priorities, but largely insulated from the rest of the world. The result in many aspects resembles the dinosaur. This conference will in plenary session examine the politics of participation in cancer care, in particular quality and access to care, and address the current state of funding for cancer care in Australia, drawing comparisons with the position in the United States in particular. On Friday, Dr Paul Kleiheus, Director of the International Agency for Research on Cancer, will present a global perspective on the gap, between rich and poor nations, in relation to access and quality.

What is the future of cancer care policy within developed countries? Free market theory posits that fully informed buyers, armed with ample information on sellers, prices and quality, will be making more discriminating choices about whom they will accept as their health care practitioners.

In Friday's plenary session, Dr Leon White, Consultant at the Harvard Business School, will examine healthcare consumerism in this maturing, globalised world. In the contemporary market, savvy, internet informed consumers are demanding higher quality and efficiency from the healthcare professional, while at the same time, preserving freedom of choice.

Nowhere is the significance of globalisation more keenly noticed than through the immense computational power which now drives the electronic super highway, steering rapid communication across the world. The dramatic advances in computer hardware and software brought about by engineers and programmers have led to the creation of powerful engines enabling the medical and scientific communities to drive research and patient care beyond the boundaries of what was, but a quarter of a century ago, the stuff of fancy, science fiction. Today's electronic symposium examines the use of the internet and video conferencing as enabling tools in patient communication. Professional education on-line is now assuming increasing importance as well. No better example exists than the on-line service provided by the American Society of Clinical Oncology, and Professor Michael Glode, Editor of ASCO on-line, will update the conference on the capabilities of that service.

Advances in cancer research technology have increased dramatically in recent years, and computational capability has been an important driving force in molecular discovery. Today's Cancer Research Symposium will address the new technologies underpinning fundamental biomedical cancer research. The greatest achievement of research technology to date, the Human Genome Project, is crucial to an understanding of the translation of fundamental biomedical cancer research to the care of patients. The theme of the Cancer Research Symposium will extend to Friday's symposium evaluating cancer care in a globalised world. The impact of enabling research and communication technologies have social, ethical and legal implications for future molecular discovery, the development of new pharmaceuticals, an understanding of the genomics of different species, and, in addition, will provide the foundation for the next wave of scientific endeavour and understanding - human proteomics.

Despite these dramatic and far reaching technological advances, the human subject remains the only validated model for the evaluation of new treatments in cancer – bedside manner still counts! As in previous years, COSA's tradition of quality in care will continue, with a diverse international and local faculty addressing the latest advances in the treatment of individual cancers.

This year, there will be particular emphasis on research and new treatment strategies in the management of melanoma, fittingly in what is to our chagrin the “melanoma capital of the world”, and gynecological, gastrointestinal and breast cancers. On Friday, a Clinical Trials Symposium will update you on the goals of clinical trials, the role of different professionals who contribute to the clinical trials process, and finally, this nation’s obligation to the international effort in clinical trial research.

In closing, ladies and gentlemen, I enthusiastically applaud your initiative in participating in the conference. I expect I am the 28th person who, in opening the conference, has spoken of the critical importance of continuing professional education. The days when a medical practitioner could operate in comparative isolation, updating only by the occasional browse through the Australian Medical Journal, are long gone. So largely is any ground for the charge traditionally levied at medical practitioners, of paternalism. In this technological age, keeping up to date with rapid change is certainly necessary, if expertise is to be maintained. But I expect your participation in this event is fired fundamentally by a natural wish to render optimal service to your patients, to the wider community, indeed, to humanity.

I am now greatly honoured to declare the 28th Annual Scientific Meeting of the Clinical Oncological Society of Australia open!

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