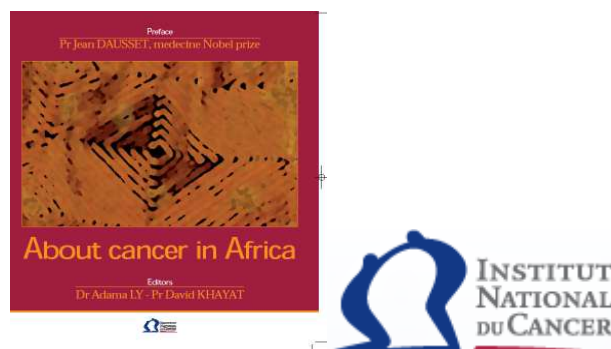


ABOUT CANCER IN AFRICA

Editors Dr. Adama Ly and Pr. David Khayat
Preface of Pr. Jean Dausset, medicine Nobel Prize
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Preface

AFRICA AND CANCER: A FINE EXAMPLE OF SCIENTIFIC AND POLITICAL RESPONSIBILITIES

Pr. Jean Dausset, Medicine Nobel Prize

It is a great honour for me to have been chosen to present this marvellous book, despite my well known lack of competence in the field.

This book represents the sum of current knowledge at this turn of the century. It is a book of references, an exemplary and exhaustive collection of studies documented with many statistical tables.

Thanks are due to the coordinators, Dr Adama Ly and Professor David Khayat, who called upon many international specialists in each field. The extraordinary complexity of the subject jumps off the pages of this work. It concerns many different cancers representing a considerable diversity.

Much remains to be done in research to understand the aetiology, often viral, the pathology, the diagnosis and the treatment of these cancers. What comes across clearly from the beginning is the implication of the responsibility of doctors and researchers on the one hand,

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and of decision makers on the other, both essential. This double responsibility should be able to stop the scandal of the gulf that exists between healthcare on the African continent and that available in developed countries.

The MURS - Universal Movement for Scientific Responsibility – that I had the honour to preside for 20 years highlighted the interaction of these two responsibilities. Researchers must not stay in their ivory towers but should rather consecrate part of their time to scientific communication and to the rational use of their discoveries for the benefit of mankind. Only then will public opinion be able to influence decision-makers: industrialists hungry for quick profits and politicians hungry for votes in the short-term.

Unfortunately, it is likely that the African scandal is set to continue for a long time yet. Let's not hide the fact that it is an extremely difficult problem, because in Africa there are other striking priorities such as AIDS. This book can be considered as a description of the situation in 2006, and as a point from which substantial progress is expected to be made in different areas.

The first problem concerns implementing collective screening as early as possible. In the current conditions of precariousness and of cultural diversity, it is probably premature to think about Predictive Medicine (close to my heart) which aims to screen for the susceptibility of each healthy individual prior to any clinical signs.

The second problem is that of diagnosis. Most often it is unfortunately only too obvious, with lesions at an advanced stage. It should be possible to make these diagnoses earlier, with more and more sophisticated means, very often out of reach in Africa. The disease incidence is different according to different cancers, or to different climatic conditions - Burkitt's lymphoma is a typical example – or according to the way the harvest is habitually stored by a particular ethnic group. I prefer to use this term. Many scientists and researchers still speak of race, a term which modern geneticists avoid, preferring to speak of an ethnic group with its own culture.

The third problem is that of treatment, often implemented too late. Women suffering from cervical cancer prefer to see the healers before consulting their doctors, often too late. Modern treatment or rather treatments are ineffective at this stage and especially when the drugs, criminally forged, are available over the counter.

The events taking place before our eyes on the African continent should greatly benefit from more and more precise and sophisticated modern genetics, full of promise. However, the study of genes implicated in cancer rarely happens in Africa and most often takes place in the highly specialised laboratories in developed countries.

Many other developments, such as anti-cancer vaccines or gene therapies are full of promise. One can never insist enough on the important role of education in the battle against myths and superstitions. Man should no longer accept his own fate passively but rather aim to assume his responsibilities.