

6TH MEETING OF THE INTERNATIONAL MESOTHELIOMA INTEREST GROUP 'RECENT ADVANCES IN MESOTHELIOMA'

& Satellite Meeting: 'Advanced technologies in cancer research - from gene chips to gene therapy.'

The 6th IMIG conference was held from 1-4 December 2002 at the University of Western Australia in Perth, Australia. The three-day meeting brought together researchers in basic science and clinical practice who shared common interests in mesothelioma biology and clinical management. The meeting provided a successful forum for delegates to interact, forging new friendships and establishing future collaborations.

The plenary sessions addressed specific questions relevant to mesothelioma biology. As a new initiative, Key Questions Workshops were conducted to identify important areas in mesothelioma biology for future research. These workshops were very successful with discussion directed at identifying mechanisms underlying mesothelioma development, the status of animal models and pre-clinical trials, the effective use of surgery, identifying new chemo- and radiotherapeutic approaches and host tumor responses and its impact on diagnosis, management and development of new therapies for mesothelioma treatment.

Some highlights from this meeting include presentations by Drs Bruce Case (Canada) and Jim Leigh (Australia) showing that the incidence of mesothelioma was still on the rise and would peak worldwide in 2010. The importance of specific signaling molecules, *Fra-1* and AP-1, in the pathogenesis of mesothelioma was discussed by Dr Brooke Mossman (USA). Dr Luciano Mutti (Italy) demonstrated that agents which switched off PI-3 kinase-AKT HGFdependent signaling in mesothelioma cells positive for SV40 T antigen increased cell cytotoxicity. Dr Andreas Strasser (Australia) described studies identifying novel pro-apoptotic members of the Bcl-2 family, Bim and Bfm, and Dr Roger Reddel (Australia) discussed how cancer cells prevent cell death by inhibiting telomere shortening through telomerase and alternative lengthening of telomeres. Dr Ken O'Byrne (UK) highlighted the immunoregulatory role of TNF- α in mesothelioma and Dr Joe Trapani (Australia) suggested that engineering T lymphocytes to contain costimulatory signals may be used therapeutically to treat mesothelioma patients. Dr Bruce Robinson (Australia) presented data showing that serum mesothelin levels may prove useful for screening asbestos-exposed individuals for the early diagnosis or likelihood of developing mesothelioma. Drs Hedy Kindler (USA), Duncan Stewart (UK) and Hugo Schouwink (Netherlands) suggested the use of computer assisted measurement techniques, contrast-enhanced magnetic imaging and cervical mediastinoscopy to evaluate tumor burden in patients, in particular those considered candidates for surgical based therapy. Drs Paul Baas (Netherlands) and Takashi Nakano (Japan) presented encouraging results from early clinical trials demonstrating positive responses in some patients treated with antifolates, thalidimide and topoisomerase inhibitors and Dr Bill Musk's (Australia) studies suggest retinol treatment as a possible approach to prevent mesothelioma development. Dr Craig Stevens (USA) demonstrated that localized radiotherapy was successful in treating residual tumor post surgery. Drs Dan Serman and Steve Albelda (USA) also announced the commencement of phase 1 gene therapy trials using adenoviral vectors containing interferon β genes, based on excellent responses in animal models.

A satellite meeting was held which highlighted recent developments in cancer diagnostics and therapy based on the latest molecular and biochemical technologies such as gene therapy, genomics and proteomics.

For further information about the next IMIG meeting and inclusion on the IMIG mailing list, please contact Dr Steven Mutsaers (IMIG Secretary): mutsaers@aari.uwa.edu.au.

Steven E. Mutsaers & Bruce W. S. Robinson Perth, Australia.