

Research

by Dr Carl Albrecht: Head Research

The joint initiative between CANSA and the Medical Research Council, known as the Cancer Research Initiative of South Africa (CARISA), continued with its activities in the year under review and launched its lead project, which is a new consortium for cervical cancer research with R1 million worth of cancer research funds.

During 2007/8, the CANSA Research Committee, under the Chairmanship of Prof GA Ogunbanjo of the University of Limpopo (MEDUNSA campus), approved applications for funding amounting to R4,1 million. Total expenditure for Type A projects was set at R3,78 million for 2008. Close to R1 million of these funds will be used to research the human papilloma virus (HPV) in South Africa, a project led by Prof Greta Dreyer of the University of Pretoria and Prof Anna Lise Williamson of the University of Cape Town.

During 2007/8, cancer research projects initiated by CANSA have gone from strength to strength. These projects are classified as Type B (general topics) and Type C for research on CANSA services. Type A projects are initiated by researchers outside of CANSA at universities or research institutions. CANSA has become more involved in the mining pollution stretching from Johannesburg to Potchefstroom. Research is being focused on cancer epidemiology in Randfontein and Carletonville where CANSA has a presence and renders service to cancer patients. Cancer patient registries are being compiled and cancer mortality data are being sought from STATS SA. On the ground, soil samples are being taken and analysed. Overall, CANSA has the objective to determine, on the basis of scientific evidence, whether people living in Randfontein and Carletonville are exposed to an increased cancer risk.

In another project, everyday products containing man-made chemicals, that may be carcinogenic, are being analysed. Examples are plasticisers such as DEHA in clingwrap, trans fatty acids in margarine and bisphenol A in polycarbonate baby bottles. Once credible research data has been collected, this will be used as an advocacy "platform" from which to lobby for legislative change in South Africa. An example of a practical outcome of the man-made molecule research was the agreement between CANSA and GLAD which sells a clingwrap that does not contain any plasticiser. In December 2007, GLADWrap signed a contract with CANSA as a partner using the CANSA "Promoting Healthy Choices" logo. CANSA receives a percentage of turnover of GLAD wrap sales in return for using this logo and endorsement.

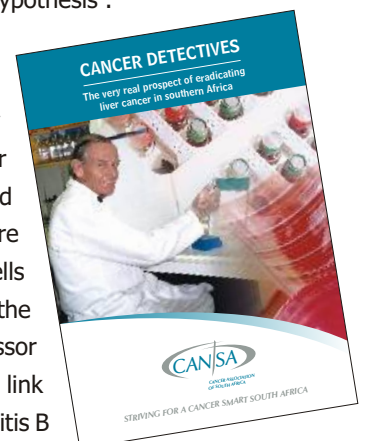
Good progress has also been achieved with a Type C project aimed at creating a new measurement scale to determine whether palliation given to a cancer patient is successful or not. Dr Hennie Loubser who is driving this project with patients seen by CANSA staff, reports that the concept of "Dignity" is of great importance and central to comprehending successful palliation. The Dignity Scale has been validated and will be handed over to CANSA at the Cancer Conference in August. It appears that this scale could be unique in the world and not only measures the quality of palliation but improves the effect of palliation.

Dr Albrecht, a representative on the International Affairs Committee of the American Association for Cancer Research (AACR), attended the annual meeting in Los Angeles from 14-18 April 2007. This meeting was attended by 7,000 delegates. It is the largest cancer research annual meeting in the world. Dr Albrecht was exposed to the latest research results on cancer. He reported on plans to use the AIDS virus to stimulate the immune system in cancer patients; plans to chart the cancer genome at a cost of hundreds of millions of dollars. This will aid diagnosis and individualised therapy.

CANSA participated in the Conference of African Organisation for Research and Training in Cancer (AORTIC) which was held at the International Convention Centre in Cape Town from 24-28 October 2007. CANSA was as a sponsor and exhibitor with over 15 CANSA staff members attending as delegates. CANSA Research Committee member Professor Paul Ruff, who heads the Department of Oncology at the University of the Witwatersrand and Johannesburg Hospital, attended on behalf of the Research Committee and also presented.

Dr Albrecht delivered two papers: "Funding strategies in Africa for cancer prevention and control" and "Prevention of colon cancer by a maize meal diet a hypothesis".

CANSA produced and published the booklet entitled "Cancer Detectives - The very real prospect of eradicating liver cancer in southern Africa" and printed 5 000 copies which were well received. This booklet tells the incredible success story of the team of scientists led by Professor Michael Kew in discovering link between liver cancer and hepatitis B



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and the subsequent development of the hepatitis B vaccine which is being used in Africa and Asia and is reducing the rate of liver cancer.

AG Oettlé Memorial Medal

CANSA awarded three winners of the prestigious AG Oettlé Memorial Medal at the National Annual General Meeting on 18 September 2007. Prof Louis Goedhals, Dr Georges de Mûelenaere and Dr Carl Albrecht were awarded for their outstanding contribution to cancer research and service to CANSA.

Dr Alfred George Oettlé was born in Port Elizabeth in 1919, graduated MBChB from the University of the Witwatersrand in 1942. He had obtained his BSc (Hons) degree in 1940. Throughout his undergraduate career, he achieved first-class honours in almost every subject and was the recipient of no less than five awards while a student of the University from 1936-1940. For seven years after his graduation he worked in the Department of Anatomy. During this time he was awarded a Nuffield Foundation Medical Fellowship at the University of Oxford, and spent 15 months in the Department of Haematology at the Radcliffe Infirmary. Later he was awarded the Lady Cade Memorial Fellowship, which he used to study cancer research methods in various laboratories in Europe.

Upon his return to South Africa in 1951, he was appointed Cancer Research Fellow at the South African Institute for Medical Research (SAIMR). Gradually he built up around him a unit whose name and fame became known and admired in every corner of the world where cancer research was in progress. Recognising the quality of his work, the Cancer Association of South Africa (CANSA) decided in 1958 to give him full financial support and from that date his unit at the SAIMR became the responsibility of CANSA.

Dr Oettlé served the Association with distinction until his death on 6 November 1967 at the age of 47. His research over 16 years strengthened the theory that environment might be all important in the cause of cancer. He broke new ground in conducting a survey of cancer rates in the African community. This survey, planned with meticulous attention to detail, has become the standard pattern for similar surveys where accurate statistics are not available. As a result of this work, he became convinced that at least 80 percent of cancers were induced by environmental factors and were therefore, at least theoretically, preventable.

Dismayed and distressed by the early death of this brilliant research worker, his colleagues gathered together a sum of money, which was donated to CANSA with the request that a memorial to him be established. The association decided on 31 March 1969 to endow a medal to be known as the Oettlé Memorial Medal.

This medal may be awarded to South African (s) who (a) through original research have made valuable contributions in regard to cancer or (b) rendered service of outstanding value to the association.



Prizewinners Prof Goedhals, Dr Albrecht & Dr de Mûelenaere

Past Oettlé Memorial Medal Winners

Prof Louis Goedhals	2007
Dr Georges de Mûelenaere	2007
Dr Carl Albrecht	2007
Mr TB Toms	1999
Dr Gordon Grant	1997
Mrs Oettlé	1996
Dr Richard Peto	1996
Prof FG Geldenhuys	1995
Prof MC Kew	1981
Prof W Gevers	1981
Dr G MacNab	1977
Dr JJ Alexander	1977
Dr JS Harington	1977
Mrs Oettlé	1973