



The African Organization for Research and Training in Cancer

E.J. Freireich MD DSc(Hon)

As the nations of the African continent continue to improve their standard of living (including better housing, improved nutrition, access to education, and so on), public health is emerging as a significant necessity. Improved sanitation and improving control of infectious and metabolic diseases mean that the expected life span of these populations is increasing. As a result, and as has occurred in every other culture, cancer begins to emerge as the most significant health care problem. Given that reality, the African Organization for Research and Training in Cancer (AORTIC)—an organization that had already initiated activities to support research and training in cancer prevention and treatment (“cancer control”) in 1982—merits support from the entire international cancer community.

In the manuscript by Mohammed and colleagues in this issue of *Current Oncology*, the authors have summarized the history of AORTIC’s development and its prospects. Description of the unique childhood cancer that became known as Burkitt lymphoma originally stimulated interest in research addressing the malignancies that occur in Africa. To that end, an organizing committee was formed in 1982. The committee consisted of leading physician–scientists from African nations and several international representatives who, together, organized a series of meetings, the first of which took place in 1983 and was attended by just 24 doctors. A second meeting was organized in 1985, and a third, in 1989, but by 1991, the anticipated continued growth of the organization had halted.

In 2000, AORTIC was revitalized by representatives from African nations and the United States. Since then, the organization has again been able to organize congresses, the fourth of which was held in 2003, attracting 300 attendees from 17 African

countries, Europe, and North America. Subsequently, 2005 saw a fifth international conference, and 2007, a sixth. The seventh congress was held in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, in 2009, and the most recent congress, the eighth, was held in Cairo, December 2011, attracting 300 delegates mostly from African countries. The next congress is planned for 2013 in Durban, South Africa.

The progressive growth of the organization holds the potential for affecting all aspects of cancer control on the African continent. Specifically, the organization acts as a resource for the emerging new leaders in African cancer control. The organization hopes to attract funding for that purpose, as well as attention to the cancer problem. They are organizing conferences to bring attention to the problem on the part of policymakers and scientists alike, and they are able to attract outstanding leaders in cancer research, cancer detection, and treatment to give lectures and symposia at their meetings and to act as consultants to growing programs within the continent of Africa. Particularly important is the training of individuals for research, patient care, prevention, nursing, epidemiology, and more. All disciplines related to cancer control need trained staff either within individual African nations or internationally. As a vehicle to bring the international community on board to support cancer control activities in the African nations, AORTIC will both improve the health of individuals in those nations and provide unique opportunities for research and care of cancer patients, not only on the African continent but throughout the world.

Correspondence to: Emil J. Freireich, The University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center, 1515 Holcombe Boulevard, Houston, Texas 77030 U.S.A.

E-mail: efreirei@mdanderson.org