

Preface

Treating head and neck cancer involves the treatment of tumors within a highly complex anatomical and physiological environment. Because end organs for critical sensorimotor functions such as breathing, speaking, swallowing, seeing, and hearing are found within the head and neck, the eradication of the disease is particularly challenging. Life-threatening diseases must be approached in a manner that not only maximizes survival, but also maximizes functional outcome.

While the overall goal is generally cure or palliation, a variety of treatment options exists. Treatment approaches must be balanced with planning for toxicity reduction and functional preservation. A major objective of this book is to emphasize that the evaluation of treatment methods for head and neck cancer can transcend simple measurement of survival by also considering how particular treatments affect the life of the individual patient. That is, the manner in which function is preserved must be evaluated in conjunction with more traditional measures of health and disease. Measures of function are important clinical endpoints and can serve to evaluate the extent to which a treatment affects a patient's overall health and well-being. Chapters in this volume examine this concept from the perspective of sites of disease within the head and neck as well as treatment methodology.

Measures that take into account the patient's perspective are particularly useful for dimensions of health in which the individual is the only person who can truly appreciate the condition. Variables such as pain and fatigue fit into this category, as do assessments of "quality of life." As a field of study, health-related quality of life (HR-QOL) research and measurement has expanded greatly over the last 30 years. To date, there are over 125,000 articles indexed in Medline (PubMed) with the heading of "quality of life" and over 2700 of these articles are concerned with head and neck cancer. This great interest in HR-QOL with regard to head and neck cancer not only reflects the importance of including concepts of quality of life in our research but it also shows that quality of life is an important factor influencing our treatment selection in the care of individual patients.

The contributors to this volume are renowned international experts in the field of head and neck cancer. Their outstanding contributions cover a wide range of topics including epidemiological issues associated with different tumor sites, treatment outcomes and toxicities associated with different treatment techniques, and the support of quality of life and the prevention of its decrements associated with therapy. The incorporation of quality of life themes into this framework offers a patient-centered perspective to the treatment of head and neck cancer and is geared toward functional preservation.

Our goal is to have an accessible volume with state-of-the-art content focused on preservation of function in head and neck cancer patients. All chapters in this volume begin with a list of key points providing readers a synopsis of core information concerning each of the major content areas discussed. Thus, it is possible for the busy clinician to gain an appreciation of the subject matter and to follow with more in depth study as time allows.

We are grateful for the opportunity to work on this rewarding project and thank all of the contributors for their outstanding chapters. It is our hope that this book will provide a foundation for exploration of patient-centered functional outcomes for individuals with head and neck cancer across the full range of sites and stages. For this field, our ultimate goals include a decrease in cancer incidence, increase in cancer cure, and, importantly, preservation of function. Much work has been done to this end, and there is more work to do. Perhaps the information presented in this book will inspire new directions related to the treatment of this complex disease.

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