

Preface

For the last two decades, the management of the head and neck cancers has been characterized by a number of profound mutations, both triggered by the willingness of oncologists to reshape significantly their conceptual approaches to locally advanced diseases and facilitated by the advent of new, more active drugs. Indeed, the potentialities of functional imaging, the significant progresses in conservative surgery and reconstruction, the acknowledged role of concurrent chemo-radiation, the investigational use of combined therapies for organ preservation, and the advent of targeted therapies are among the main tracks along which fundamental changes in philosophy of management have been recently observed. Coincident with this came the necessity to move progressively to a much more holistic approach, taking greater account of quality of life after treatment.

At the same time, it is important to remember that progress in head and neck cancer management is benefiting from an increasing understanding of all aspects involved in the development of these carcinomas, ranging from the molecular genetics of tumor growth to epidemiological and etiological factors, the role of which has been somewhat underestimated in the past, especially with respect to the natural history of the disease in individual patients.

Recently, intensive translational research in head and neck oncology yielded a large burden of significant laboratory discoveries and clinical breakthroughs. Paradoxically, these advances generated at the same time an often contradictory and confusing body of literature, which nevertheless emphasizes that, as red thread, the management of this disease must be *multidisciplinary*.

Therefore, there is room for a guide to contemporary management of head and neck cancer, and with this perspective, this textbook was designed and written with the intent of providing oncologists with a broad, comprehensive and balanced view of both consolidated and innovative concepts. Its objective is to help practitioners understand better the mechanisms that drive the development of head and neck cancer, as well as revisit the evidence-based data and complexities of decision-making in this field.

The first part of the textbook covers the vast domain that pertains to the scientific basis of head and neck oncology, ranging from epidemiology and etiology of these carcinomas to biomolecular mechanisms driving the cell malignant transformation and tumor growth. In particular, this book provides key information on those molecular analyses that are bound to pave the way, in head and neck oncology, for the eventual development of highly personalized future treatment strategies.

The second part reviews the key diagnosis modalities used in head and neck oncology, a field in which great progress is being made with not only a refinement of morphological imaging, but also an intensive preclinical and clinical research devoted to tumor metabolism. A greater understanding of the correlation between tumor types and patterns of spread will indeed allows clinicians to optimize combinations of treatments in each individual patient.

The book continues with a systematic account of the current management of individual cancers in function of their site of origin. The chapters of this third section of the textbook are organized to provide the readers with an exhaustive review of organ-oriented strategies. Each contribution explores the most recent evidence-based data and expert opinions, which reflect up-to-date diagnosis and treatment approaches.

The fourth and last part covers a number of issues worth considering in the comprehensive management of this disease, such as, quality assurance programs, patient rehabilitation, salvage treatments, and quality of life.

This textbook is aimed at showing how considerable are today's efforts toward improving treatment outcomes for head and neck cancer patients. This willingness to make significant and rapid progress probably derives from the fact that rarely in oncology are treatment failures more readily visible and functionally impairing than in these patients. This, together with the fact that head and neck cancer is a "big killer" worldwide, fully justifies the intensive translational and clinical research that fosters and optimizes our ways to plan and deliver treatments. Undoubtedly, these efforts allow investigators to take a number of significant steps forward, which foreshadow the implementation of treatment combinations *tailored* to each patient.

A timely account of our present knowledge of the principles and present day practice, this textbook reflects the considerable personal experiences of the experts who offer their contributions.

Without access to a multidisciplinary tumor board for guidance, many practitioners often remain confused about the appropriate therapy for patients with head and neck cancer. In this perspective too, we hope that this textbook will provide a source of knowledge and references not only to the established oncologist entrusted with the care of head and neck cancer patients, but also to the less experienced practitioner willing to get a better understanding of this multifaceted, complex field of oncology.

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Multimodality Management

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