

THE EORTC AND THE EORTC BREAST CANCER GROUP

Therasse Patrick, MD

Director EORTC Data Center and Coordinating Physician for breast cancer trials

The European Organisation for Research and Treatment of Cancer (EORTC) was founded as a non for profit private international organization under Belgian law in 1962 by eminent oncologists working in the main cancer research institutes of the EU countries and Switzerland. The aims of EORTC are to develop, conduct, coordinate, and stimulate laboratory and clinical research in Europe to improve the management of cancer and related problems by increasing survival but also patients' quality of life. The EORTC is composed of the General Assembly, the Board, several committees, the headquarters (in Brussels) and the network of more than 2500 scientists and clinical investigators. All EORTC activities (with the exception of training courses and conferences) are research activities divided into laboratory research and clinical research conducted by multidisciplinary groups. Scientists and clinicians willing to participate in EORTC research are organized in EORTC groups (or task forces) according to their area of interest and expertise. Over the last 5 years, 21 EORTC clinical research groups recruited 26 334 new patients have been entered in EORTC trials. 650 different institutions participated in EORTC activities. 120 new studies have been activated out of which 58 were Phase III studies, 45 phase II studies, 14 phase I studies and 3 phase II-III studies.

EORTC receives financial support from private foundations, the US NCI and the industry (for trial done in collaboration with Industry) but there is no direct support from the European Commission neither from any national health authorities. Further information about EORTC can be found on the EORTC website at www.eortc.be.

The EORTC Breast Cancer Group is a multidisciplinary group involving surgeons, radiation oncologists and medical oncologists, pathologists, radiologists, biologists, psychologists and research

fellows. Currently, the Group includes 17 institutions with the status of active member and 75 institutions with the status of probationary member. The main activity of the Group has been to carry out large clinical studies covering a wide spectrum of breast cancer patients. Translational research evaluating correlations between clinical outcomes and biologic tumour characteristics has become a high priority. Examples of such investigations include the potential predictive value of P53 gene mutation in primary chemotherapy of locally advanced breast cancer (EORTC 10994) and detection of micrometastasis in sentinel lymph nodes by PCR (EORTC 10981). A quality control task force also performs the evaluation of institutions applying for Group membership. In preparation, the MINDACT trial (EORTC 10041) is an EORTC coordinated study conducted under the BIG /TRANSBIG network. It will use microarray technology to classify early stage breast cancer patients into groups with high and low risk of distant relapse and compare this assessment to what is currently used in clinical practice, the latter taking into consideration traditional clinico-pathological factors.

Within the last three years the number of patients included in clinical studies is stable: 1008 in 2002, 1020 in 2003 and in 2004 it was 856. A total 9 clinical trials were open for the accrual in 2004.

The Group has prepared and is continuously updating the Manual for Clinical Research in Breast Cancer, used as a reference for protocol elaboration, data collection and reporting of results (recently also online: 'www.bco.org' breast cancer online). Every 2 years, the group organizes 'the European Breast Cancer Conference' in collaboration with the European Society of Mastology (EUSOMA) and Europa Donna (the European Breast Cancer Coalition). Further information about the EORTC breast group (including breast group trials) can be found on the website: <http://groups.eortc.be/breast/>.