

OTS: 60-41,683

JPRS: 5938

31 October 1960

SOVIET INITIATIVE IN THE CONTROL OF CANCER
SUPPORTED BY THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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Following is the translation of an unsigned article entitled "Sovetskaya Initsiativa v Bor'be protiv Raka Podderzhana General'noy Assambleyey OON" (English version above) in Vestnik Rentgenologii i Radiologii (Herald of Roentgenology and Radiology), Vol. 35, No. 3, Moscow, 1960, pages 3-7.

On 20 Nov 1959 the UN General Assembly passed a resolution destined to play an important role in the international control of one of the worst enemies of mankind - cancer. By the decision of the General Assembly, a United Nations prize was established which will be awarded periodically for the most outstanding scientific research works on the elucidation of the causes of cancer diseases and their control.

It is significant that the initiative in regard to this problem came from the Soviet Union through the UN delegation of the BSSR headed by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the BSSR, K. V. Kiselev. This is one more humane enterprise of the Soviet people, another step directed toward the unification of the efforts of nations and governments in their common fight for the progress of science, for the improvement of the health of the people, and for the future happiness of mankind.

The people of the world have already become used to the fact that everything most progressive and humane, everything which has as its goal the peace, happiness and well-being of people, comes from the nation which accomplished in 1917 the greatest revolution in history -- the October Revolution -- and which, within a brief historical period, has nearly achieved the building of a Communist society. The latest events in the internal and international life of our country are a convincing proof of this. The consistently peaceful policy of the Soviet Union, the principles of which were laid down by the Bol'shevik Party headed by V. I. Lenin as early as the first years of existence of the Soviet State, is achieving at present its

most striking realization in a number of concrete decisions and actions of our Communist Party and Soviet government. The speech of Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev at the UN General Assembly, with a suggestion of total and complete disarmament, has been met with enthusiasm by everyone who loves peace and sincerely believes in the real possibility of peaceful coexistence of nations and countries, independently of his political beliefs or the form of government of his country. The subsequent decision of the 4th Session of the Supreme Council of the USSR to make a new, 1,200,000-man reduction in the armed forces of the Soviet Union represented a direct proof that the Soviet Union, not in words but in deeds is seeking peace and is concerned with the well-being of people. With the exceptions of a few fascistically inclined governments, whose imperialist tendencies could not be corrected even by the bitter lessons of history, and immoderately militaristic "Strausses" who enjoy the odor of the cold war (and, apparently, not the cold war only), the entire world received with gratitude and relief the news of this new humane act of our nation and our government.

The entire world is familiar with the noble mission of N. S. Khrushchev which he carried out in the name of the Soviet people in countries which until just recently lived under the heavy yoke of colonialism. The sincere and unselfish aid which the Soviet Union rendered to these backward and economically poorly developed nations is another proof of the true humanism which can mature only in a nation which had undertaken the highest task of building a Communist society. These and similar actions of the Soviet people and its government and the numerous peaceful addresses of our government to the governments of the capitalist countries with offers of international cooperation on various problems of economics, culture and science have resulted at the present time in such a climate throughout the entire world that every sensible individual looks with hope and confidence to everything that issues from our country.

Under these circumstances it is perfectly logical that precisely in the USSR was born the idea to stimulate by all possible means the efforts of scientists throughout the whole world in the control of cancer affections.

The history of medicine contains no other example of such a prolonged and, at the same time, all-embracing fight against a disease. During this centuries-old struggle there have been hopes and not a few victories, but also quite a few disappointments and defeats. Nevertheless, today there is no room for pessimism. In recent years,

thanks to the great achievements of clinical medicine and biology, the invaluable conquests of organic chemistry and biochemistry, the extraordinary progress of modern physics, physical techniques, and electronics, considerable success in combatting cancer has already been achieved. Through the combined work of doctors, biologists, chemists, and physicists of various countries, in which not a small part has been played by Soviet researchers, much has been achieved in the elucidation of causes of cancer.

Scientist-researchers have come close to understanding the role of viruses, carcinogenic substances, and the fine and complex metabolic disorders which are, apparently, one of the most direct causes of malignant growth. Modern surgery has attained the some of technique needed in performing the complicated operations for cancer of the lungs and stomach. Radiation therapy, surgical treatment and, finally, chemo- and hormonotherapy have already achieved definite results in the treatment of certain forms and localizations of cancer lesions. Nevertheless, the most difficult and responsible tasks are still ahead of us. We still have to exert much effort in order to solve these problems. It is necessary to elicit these efforts by all possible means; it is necessary to place them within the frame of international cooperation; it is obviously essential that the highest organ of international cooperation on our globe -- the Organization of the United Nations -- take under its aegis as it has done, one of the most disturbing problems of modern times, the control of cancer.

On 23 Sept 1959, in accordance with the instructions of the government of the USSR, the head of the delegation of the USSR in the UN, K. V. Kiselev, requested that the important and vital problem of international encouragement of scientific research in the field of combatting cancer diseases be placed on the agenda of the 14th Session of the UN General Assembly. The following explanatory note was attached to K. V. Kiselev's statement.

Explanatory note

of the delegation of the USSR at the 14th session of the UN General Assembly in accordance with regulation 20 of the rules of procedure.

The delegation of the USSR submits for consideration of the 14th Session of the UN General Assembly the question: "International encouragement of scientific research in the

field of control of cancer diseases."

The posing of this question is justified on the following grounds:

Mankind is becoming progressively more disturbed by the widespread occurrence of cancer diseases. It is known that there are many obscure and debatable questions in the problem of cancer diseases. In all countries cancer is considered by people as terrible and fatal, since the causes of this affection are unknown and no effective curative means have been found.

Statistical data on the morbidity and mortality of cancer diseases show that the number of patients that die annually of cancer on our planet is over two million. This means that for every 100,000 inhabitants of the Earth, over 100 individuals die annually of cancer. If we assume that the average remaining life term of people suffering from malignant tumors varies between two to three years, it will turn out that about five millions individuals suffering from cancer diseases now live on the terrestrial globe.

According to official data, in the majority of countries cancer mortality occupies the second to third place among the causes of human mortality in general.

The available statistical data on cancer diseases throughout the world attest to the fact that the control of cancer is an international problem, in the solution of which the UN can play a positive part.

The extensive scientific research work which has been carried on for many years in various countries of the world has already ensured success in the field of control of cancer diseases.

Nevertheless, it is necessary to point out that the national and international efforts that have been undertaken up to the present time have brought no effective results. A great deal of work has still to be accomplished before effective means of treating cancer affections are found. In order to elucidate the causes of various forms of cancer affections in man, it is of immense importance to study the peculiarities of this affection in various countries and the dependence of the predominance of various types of malignant tumors on geographic, climatic, occupational and other factors.

There is no doubt that the problem of controlling cancer diseases represents one of the most important problems of world medical science. The elimination of cancer as a fatal and widespread disease of man is one of the most important problems of entire mankind. The United Nations Organization must contribute to the solution of

this problem. Article 13 of the UN Charter charges the General Assembly with the direct duty of organizing studies and making recommendations for the purpose of aiding international cooperation also in the field of public health. In this connection, the General Assembly can pass a resolution in regard to the question of international encouragement of scientific studies in the field of control of cancer diseases.

A most important means of encouragement would be the establishment by the UN of international prizes for the most outstanding scientific works in the field of control of cancer diseases. It would be no strain on the UN budget to establish three prizes totaling 100,000 dollars to be awarded to scientists every four years.

The UN General Assembly could ask the International Anticancer Scientific League to assume the task of awarding these prizes at the next World Scientific Congress on Combatting Cancer Diseases in 1962.

It would be expedient to keep the world community informed on the course of progress in the control of cancer diseases.

It would be useful, taking this into account, if the International Anticancer Scientific League would inform the UN General Assembly in 1962 on the progress achieved in the control of cancer diseases.

In connection with the aforementioned, and guided only by humanitarian interests, the delegation of the BSSR submits for discussion by the 14th Session of the General Assembly the project of the resolution.

On 20 Sept 1959 at its 241st Plenary Session the UN General Assembly, having concurred with the proposal of the Soviet delegation, passed the following resolution.

Resolution passed by the General Assembly

On the report of the 3rd Committee (A/4279)7

International encouragement of scientific studies in the field of control of cancer diseases.

The General Assembly,

Taking into consideration that cancer diseases are, at the present time, among the most dangerous diseases of mankind,

Acknowledging the common wish of mankind to check the widespread cancer diseases,

Noting with satisfaction the useful work of the World Health Organization, the International League of Cancer Control and the national organizations for cancer control,

Acknowledging at the same time that the efforts toward cancer control, which to date have been exerted on the national and international scale, have not brought forth sufficiently effective results,

Wishing to encourage further scientific work in this field in all countries and international institutions:

1. Resolves to establish prizes, called the UN prizes, of a total sum of 100,000 dollars, which will be awarded for the most outstanding scientific-research works on the elucidation of causes of cancer affections and their control, and instructs the Secretary General to organize within the next four years the awarding of these prizes in accordance with the recommendation of the World Health Organization, and to renew the award periodically as long as it will be considered necessary;

2. To ask the World Health Organization to examine in accordance with Article 4 of the agreement between UN and WHO, the problem of what further steps might be undertaken to stimulate efforts in the field of control of cancer diseases;

3. To also ask WHO to secure for this purpose the full support and scientific consultation of the International League of Cancer Control;

4. To ask WHO to inform the UN General Assembly as soon as possible of the progress achieved in combatting cancer diseases.

* * * *

Thus, the Soviet initiative in combatting cancer was fully supported by the UN General Assembly. The highly gratifying fact should particularly inspire Soviet scientist-medics and the entire medical community. There is no doubt whatever that the resolution of the General Assembly in itself must serve as a great stimulus to scientific research on the cancer problem. The essence, of course, lies not in the prize itself nor in the dollars which will be awarded for the most vital research to the more gifted scientists.

Physicians and scientist-researchers of all countries and all languages have for many years been carrying out a tireless fight against cancer. Now, in this fight, they will be stimulated by the knowledge that their work is the center of attention of the world community and that the results of this work will be evaluated by the highest organ of international cooperation -- the UN. No one, of course, can remain indifferent to this fact. In this and only in this light should one regard the immense significance of the UN resolution which has been passed, and the noble initiative in this problem manifested by the Soviet Union.

There is no doubt that the UN resolution will find among Soviet Roentgenologists and radiologists the most vivid and warm response. Roentgen radiology is a blood sister of oncology. The control of cancer is of intimate and vital interest to roentgenologists and radiologists. It will suffice to remember the role of X-ray diagnosis in such diseases as cancer of the stomach or lungs, or the role played by modern radiation therapy in malignant tumors, to understand that to roentgenologists and radiologists the cancer problem, the problem of malignant tumors, has always been and is now most disturbing and most vital. Modern medicine fully appreciates the achievements of X-ray radiology in combatting cancer. The achievements of X-ray radiology are widely and regularly used in medical practice for the purpose of diagnosis, as well as for treatment of malignant tumors. Nevertheless, what has been accomplished is still not enough. We are still very far from an early X-ray diagnosis of cancer of the stomach and lungs and other internal organs, and we have not been actively seeking methods for this early diagnosis.

Frequently we remain dissatisfied with the effectiveness of even the latest methods of radiation therapy which we employ in the practical fight against cancer and other malignant tumors, and we put very little effort into the search for other more effective and more perfect methods. The roentgenologists and radiologists are still faced with an immense field of activity, great tasks of both a research and a scientific-practical character. Who knows? Perhaps within the framework of X-ray radiology, within the limits of its possibilities, lies the solution of at least a part of the most important tasks connected with the cancer problem.

Let us, then, try within the scope of our capabilities to be worthy of the noble initiative manifested by Soviet representative on the international front of cancer control.

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