

ASEICA's 25th anniversary

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The Spanish Cancer Research Association (ASEICA, Asociación Española de Investigación sobre el Cáncer) celebrates its 25th anniversary in 2008. It was created in 1983 by an enthusiastic group of cancer investigators, led by Ysidro Valladares, ASEICA's first President. ASEICA's pioneers set out a few principles that have guided the association's activities. They can be summarized in just one sentence: "ASEICA's mission is to create the conditions to improve cancer research in Spain, with new monographic centres, more cancer scientists and better funding".

According to these principles, ASEICA was the driving force during the 1980s and 1990s, offering training in molecular oncology to young scientists, and building a dynamic forum to discuss the future of cancer research in Spain. For many years, all formative courses on offer in Spain were either organised by ASEICA or carried out under the scientific umbrella of ASEICA; the large Translational Cancer Meetings in Spain were (and hopefully still are) run by ASEICA; the initiative to create the first cancer research networks in Spain were formed at ASEICA; and the pressure to create cancer research centres in Spain was transmitted from ASEICA's Meetings and Committees to Spanish society and the Administration.

Another of ASEICA's goals was to encourage the Spanish Administration to create the appropriate conditions to help bring home the brighter Spanish scientists who were working abroad at that time: Mariano Barbacid, Manuel Perucho, Miguel Beato, Eugenio Santos, Joan Massagué, Josep Baselga –just to cite some of those that have already returned to Spain– and many others. These and other bright scientists and clinicians used to come to the biannual ASEICA Meetings and helped to develop a strong scientific stream towards cancer research that attracted many bright scientists. Altogether we were able to convince both society and the Administration that conditions were right to reach a high standard of cancer research in Spain. Political decisions were taken in the 1990s that increased funding

for cancer research. Thus, in quite a short period of time ASEICA's pioneers' dreams were fulfilled.

Despite its impressive history, the number of members, as well as ASEICA's influence in cancer research, seems to have declined in the present decade. In fact, the number of ASEICA's members barely represents one quarter of Spanish cancer investigators, as given by the Spanish cancer research network. How is this possible if there are more and better cancer scientists than ever in Spain? If ASEICA is to recover its past splendour, we need to address this question in order to re-create a new, powerful ASEICA for the next 25 years.

I think that ASEICA's influence has been weakened because most of its activities have been assumed by others, namely the large new Spanish cancer research centres; the other Spanish cancer societies (more rich and dynamic); and also the Spanish Administration, which has created a powerful cancer research network. Together, they are offering good formative courses; they are organising monographic symposiums that overlap those offered by ASEICA; the cancer research network has a budget that allows it to fulfill objectives once pursued by ASEICA. They all need to reinforce their own reputations, a situation that has evolved to the detriment of ASEICA's prestige and activities. Thus, we may conclude that perhaps ASEICA has come to a kind of "glorious apoptotic process".

Many scientists have collaborated with ASEICA during the past 25 years in developing scientific activities and meetings and participating in successive ASEICA committees. We are especially indebted to one of them, Juan C. Lacal, who served first as Association Secretary, then as President, and has covered a long period of time as Editor-in-Chief of *Clinical and Translation Oncology*, being part of the living history of ASEICA. Many thanks to the efforts of all the pioneers, and to the members of the ASEICA committees over the first 25 years of the association. Their main legacy is the powerful research force that has boosted Spanish cancer research to the high level that it now occupies.

But at the present time it is necessary for us, ASEICA's old fighters, to give a new boost to the association. We must convince ourselves, and then Spanish cancer researchers, that ASEICA has an important role in the quality

of cancer research to be done in Spain during the next 25 years. We must believe that ASEICA will emerge from its present situation by creating new ways to fulfil the dreams of today's young generations of cancer researchers. We have to preserve ASEICA's legacy, and start a new era by taking a number of initiatives to reach at least the following objectives:

1) Increase ASEICA's income, which is a prerequisite for any other project. This can be achieved by a permanent collaboration with the pharmaceutical and biotechnical industries, and also with the Administration, by offering all the best of ASEICA: its scientific potential and cancer comprehension capability.

2) Attract young cancer researchers to ASEICA, offering them the chance to present their research at high-quality meetings. If ASEICA has any future, it lies in the young cancer researchers' hands. Successful initiatives in this direction were the former Oncogene Meetings organised by ASEICA in the 1980s and early 1990s, and more recently the Young Cancer Research Meetings (www.icic.es), which stimulate young scientists to create a collaborative atmosphere to work on high-risk projects.

3) Create the section "from bench to industry", devoted to young biotechnology entrepreneurs, to share tips and

problem solving to help young researchers with the initiative to enter the industry.

4) Create a task force to interact with Spanish society, by offering education on cancer research of high quality and good performance. This possibility has been also successfully explored in ASEICA's meetings and is more than welcome by society. Only those able to dream will be able to make this a reality.

5) Create a section on "cancer in the future" to define objectives and work out new initiatives that the Administration should take in order to improve cancer care and research. It is central to ASEICA (and to any other scientific society) to work together with the Administration to help to envision a new, bright future.

However, this also represents an opportunity to rebuild the association with a new and strong structure. As President of ASEICA, I invite all its members to think about these objectives, and to suggest new ones that will make a great, new ASEICA, for the next 25 years. They will be discussed at the 25th Anniversary Meeting, which will be held on 9–10 July at Santiago de Compostela (see the Scientific Program in this issue, and all the information and news on the webpage: www.aseica.com).