The evolution of cancer care: From traditional approaches to cutting-edge therapies.

Torunn Halvorsen*

Department of Nutrition, Institute of Basic Medical Sciences, University of Oslo, Norway.

Introduction

Cancer care has undergone a transformative journey over the past century. From the early days of rudimentary treatments to the current era of personalized medicine, the evolution of cancer therapies has significantly improved survival rates and quality of life for patients. This article explores the milestones in cancer treatment, highlighting the transition from traditional approaches to modern, cutting-edge therapies that are reshaping the future of oncology [1,2].

Surgery was one of the first effective treatments for cancer, dating back to the 19th century. Early surgical interventions were often radical and disfiguring, aimed at completely removing the tumor along with large margins of healthy tissue to prevent recurrence. Pioneering surgeons like William Halsted developed techniques such as the radical mastectomy for breast cancer, which involved the removal of the entire breast, underlying chest muscles, and lymph nodes [3,4].

While these surgeries were often successful in removing the tumor, they were associated with significant morbidity. Over time, surgical techniques have evolved to become less invasive and more precise. Advances such as minimally invasive surgery, robotic-assisted procedures, and sentinel lymph node biopsy have reduced the physical and emotional impact on patients while maintaining high rates of cancer control [5].

Radiation therapy emerged in the early 20th century as a powerful tool to destroy cancer cells by damaging their DNA. Initially, the use of radiation was limited by the inability to precisely target tumors, leading to damage to surrounding healthy tissue. Technological advancements, such as the development of linear accelerators and computerized planning systems, have greatly enhanced the precision and effectiveness of radiation therapy [6].

Chemotherapy, introduced in the mid-20th century, revolutionized cancer treatment by using drugs to kill rapidly dividing cells. The discovery of alkylating agents during World War II, originally developed for chemical warfare, led to the realization that these compounds could target cancer cells. The first successful use of chemotherapy was with nitrogen mustard to treat lymphoma [7].

In addition to their roles in development, transcription factors are also involved in the response to environmental stimuli, such as hormones, nutrients, or stress signals. For instance, steroid hormone receptors function as transcription factors that modulate gene expression in response to hormone binding, regulating processes ranging from metabolism to immune function. Similarly, transcription factors activated by stress signals, such as heat shock factor or hypoxia-inducible factor, help cells adapt to challenging conditions by activating stress-responsive genes.

Over the decades, a wide variety of chemotherapeutic agents have been developed, each with different mechanisms of action. These drugs can be administered alone or in combination to attack cancer cells at various stages of their growth cycle. Combination chemotherapy regimens, such as the MOPP protocol for Hodgkin's lymphoma, significantly improved survival rates and became the cornerstone of treatment for many cancers [8,9].

Hormonal therapies emerged as a targeted approach to treating cancers that are driven by hormones, such as breast and prostate cancer. These therapies work by either reducing the production of hormones or blocking their receptors on cancer cells. For example, tamoxifen, introduced in the 1970s, blocks estrogen receptors in breast cancer cells, preventing the hormone from fueling tumor growth [10].

Conclusion

The evolution of cancer care from traditional approaches to cutting-edge therapies has profoundly improved patient outcomes and quality of life. Advances in surgery, radiation, chemotherapy, targeted therapies, and immunotherapy have each contributed to the progress in treating this complex disease. As we continue to explore new frontiers in precision medicine, combination therapies, and emerging technologies, the future of cancer treatment holds great promise for achieving more effective and personalized care for patients worldwide.

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***Correspondence to:** Torunn Halvorsen, Hubei Key Laboratory of Agricultural Bioinformatics, Huazhong Agricultural University, Wuhan 430070, China. E-mail: halvorsen@medisn.ui.no

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