

EDITORIAL

QUALITY ASSURANCE AND MALAYSIAN PATHOLOGY

1987 has seen the beginnings of changes of significance to Malaysian Pathology. Separate subcommittees for the various major disciplines of Pathology i.e. Chemical Pathology, Haematology, Histopathology and Medical Microbiology, were created within the Malaysian Society of Pathologists. One of the first tasks that these subcommittees set out on was the introduction of quality assurance and educational programmes within their respective disciplines. This must surely reflect the consciousness among Malaysian pathologists of how seriously the quality of their work affects the standard of medical practice in the country and their desire to continually assess and improve themselves and the services for which they are responsible. It also signifies the recognition by the Society of the leading role it must take in introducing and supporting the concept and practice of quality assurance and continuing education among Malaysian Pathologists.

That we have taken an important step cannot be denied: quality assurance and quality control must become a "way of life" among all laboratory staff if we are to remain a respected and responsible profession. Society recognises this and it is likely that future legislation of medical laboratories will place due emphasis on quality control and quality assurance measures. However, running a quality assurance programme is no easy task and there are few professional societies who dare such an undertaking. Nevertheless, although our quality assurance and educational programmes are only at their infancy, the spirit with which members have participated in these activities has been most encouraging. In publishing a symposium on Quality Assurance Programmes, this Journal follows on the lead set during the 11th. Annual Scientific Meeting of the Society. By drawing on the experience of our Australian colleagues, we hope to present to readers the strategies, goals, activities and commitments that constitute the essential elements of quality assurance programmes and the problems encountered in running them.

Also highlighted in this issue of the Journal is the Second K. Prathap Memorial Lecture. This lecture addressed the problem continually faced by histopathologists as they strive to elucidate the biological nature and histogenesis of that very common scourge — lung cancer. At first it may appear that the information gained with immunohistochemistry, monoclonal antibodies and electron microscopy has only made the picture more confused. Yet surely all new information is important and has a contribution to make to our understanding of disease. The questions raised also serve to fire the impetus for review and change. It is perhaps time to reexamine and, if necessary, shed current views regarding lung cancer. Evidence is mounting that many lung cancers do not differentiate along pure cell lines and that the major forms of lung cancer "represent a continuum of differentiation with a common cell lineage." These findings may well have bearing on the prognosis of the disease and selection of patients for appropriate therapy.

Invited articles covering perspectives in Pathology of interest to readers are also featured in this issue of the Journal. The history and future of Pathology is very amply reviewed by one who has been associated with the development of Pathology in the international scene. His views will be relevant as we consider our role in the international fraternity of pathologists and in the future direction of Malaysian pathology. The second feature article addresses the issue of rational blood usage, a consideration of paramount importance in medical practice. Because pathologists, as managers and consultants of blood transfusion services, have the responsibility of promoting good medical care through proper and rational use of blood and blood products, this article is felt to be highly appropriate and useful.

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Editor