The light of hope: International symposium on Cancer

January 29-31, 2010, Dhaka

We've just finished the first month of the New Year 2010 with an International Symposium on Cancer that took place from January 29 to 31. The three day long Symposium entitled "International Symposium on Cancer and Developmental Biology: Latest Clinical and Biochemical Advances" was jointly organized by the Bangladesh Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology (BSBMB) and the Department of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology of Dhaka University (DU) and was held at Nawab Ali Chowdhury Senate Bhaban of the University.

The first day of the conference was started with the inauguration ceremony. The Vice Chancellor of DU Prof. Dr. AAMS Arefin Siddique was the chief guest while the Dean of the Faculty of Biological Sciences Prof. Dr. MA Bashar acted as the guest of honor. President of BSBMB Prof. Dr. Syed Saleheen Qadri presided over the inaugural session. Vice President of BSBMB Prof. Ishtiaq Mahmud and General Secretary of BSBMB Prof. Haseena Khan also spoke on the occasion. This Symposium was dedicated to the former President of BSBMB Prof. Dr. Harun Kader Mohammad Yusuf, whom we lost due to cancer.

Prof. Arefin in his inaugural speech said Cancer is on the steep rise in all countries of the world, including Bangladesh. About one million people are now suffering from cancer in Bangladesh. The total number of newly diagnosed cancer cases is about 2,00,000 and about 1,50,000 people die of cancer every year in Bangladesh. It is a fatal disease in Bangladesh as elsewhere in the world. He added that cancer of the uterus is common among Bangladeshi women. According to an estimate, as many as 26 percent of women in Bangladesh suffer from the cancer of the uterus. Lack of health awareness is the main reason why cancer of the uterus is so common in Bangladesh. Approximately 30,000 women develop breast cancer annually and the majority of these women, about 90 percent of them, die of this disease in Bangladesh due to lack of

awareness and timely treatment. "Developmental Biology is a vast field of investigation that includes the study of all changes associated with an organism as it progresses through the life cycle. We witnessed phenomenal progress in contemporary developmental biology when molecular biology was integrated with genetic analysis", said Dr. MA Bashar.

Dr. Akira Nakagawara delivered his plenary lecture on the first day of the symposium highlighting his research on "Translational Oncogenomics and Molecular Carcinogenesis of Neuroblastoma". In this lecture, he told about some proteins which are regarded as the nerve growth factor and their uses to prevent neuroblastoma, a kind of solid brain tumor.

The second day of the conference included the plenary lecture delivered by Dr. T.C. Wu, who spoke on Perspectives of Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) vaccine development for Cervical Cancer using some of the HPV surface proteins such as HPV E6, HPV E7 etc. Later on the same day, the invited speaker Dr. Akshay Anand delivered his lecture on his research finding "Stem cells repopulate the laser injured retina in mouse" followed the speech by Dr. Faiyaz about "Tyrosine Kinase Signalling Pathway: A Paradigm for Molecular Screening in Targeted Cancer Therapy".

Then followed the Oral presentation in two sessions where a total of eight lecturers were included. The first session was based on the molecular mechanism of Cancer and the last was based on Nutrition in Cancer. During the interval of the two sessions, a poster presentation competition was held in two categories -- one belonged to the scientific research paper presentation by Postgraduate students and the other included the posters from the undergraduate students. The participants were judged by the teachers of the Department of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology of DU and the name of the winners was announced at the end of the second day of

Symposium. Besides, in honour of the foreign guests a dinner party was hosted, where all the participants of the symposium were invited. This was another interesting part as we got the chance to talk with the experts and had the dinner altogether.

The last day of the symposium was started with the plenary lecture of Dr. Hideaki Tanaka who spoke on "A Novel Repulsive Axon Guidance Protein, Draxin". Draxin is actually Dorsal Repulsive Axon guidance Protein, which acts as the roof plate-derived chemo repellent for commissural axons in chick spinal cord. He discussed how Draxin deficiency has developed defects in axonal projections of all three commissures. The corpus callosum, hippocampal commissure and anterior commissure in the fore brain.

This plenary lecture was followed by another lecture and a oral presentation session 3 and session 4. Oral presentation Session 3 focused on the roles of Arsenic in cancer while Session 4 discussed about Nutrition in cancer. These sessions were focused to describe the factors that initiate and regulate cancer.

In a nutshell, the symposium was a highly educative arrangement where the students like us got the opportunity to meet such world-class researchers and get new ideas from them to learn. Here I must mention that I particularly found my interest on the lecture delivered by Dr. Akshay Anand, as it was about the stem cells. Regarding stem cells, I would like to cite a story from "Harry Potter".

In the second part of the series, "Harry Potter and The Chamber of Secrets", Harry broke his hand during a game. One of his professors, Prof. Gilderoy tried to mend it by applying spell, but due to wrong spell, the whole bone of Harry's hand vanished. However, to treat this, Harry was given a magical medicine named "Skel-e-grow", which helped to grow the whole new bone of his hand overnight.

I mentioned the story here because, even though we don't have the magical "Skel-e-

grow", but we have Stem Cells with its magical ability to be differentiated into any type of cells. Hence, it can be used to grow new organs, replacing damaged cells. Most of all, according to Dr. Anand's research, there is possibility to use the stem cells for giving back the eye sights to those blinded by the disease.

Participating in the Symposium, I also learned that public awareness should be

raised against cancer. Most of the people, especially the women are unaware of the cancers (e.g. Breast cancer, uterus cancer etc.). The incidence of these two categories of cancer is relatively higher in our country. So it is an urgent need to carry out an all out campaign to raise especial awareness among the women. Exchange of knowledge through this kind of symposium is a right step in the right

direction and will definitely work out in fulfilling such purposes. All concerned have to come forward to raise consciousness among people to fight against cancer.

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