Vasculitides: Roads traveled and avenue to pursue

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In the field of vasculitides, the ANCA and Vasculitis Workshops are certainly major events. All physicians, researchers and patients’ associations have the opportunity to meet and share information and knowledge. These events are the cornerstone of exchanges among colleagues and, meeting after meeting, we can see how vasculitis care has improved.

This 16th workshop is also the 25th anniversary of the ANCA meetings. The first one was organized in 1988 in Copenhagen, by Alan Wiik and Niels Rasmussen (box 1). Twenty-five years later, we can measure the impact of research on vasculitides and the major contributions of our regular meetings. Before the discovery of ANCA, few physicians were interested in vasculitides and, although clinical descriptions were precise, patients’ outcomes were poor. Most of them died in the short-term and the treatments prescribed were our first halting attempts to do something.

ANCA discovery has fostered basic and clinical research on vasculitides. For the first time, physicians from different specialities – internal medicine, rheumatology, nephrology... – shared their knowledge and joined forces to achieve major advances.

The pathogenic mechanisms of vasculitides are now better understood, ANCA antigens have been identified, virus-associated forms have been described, diseases have been classified and, because members of the vasculitis community have worked together, effective therapeutic strategies have been devised.

We are now far from the time when at least half the patients died soon after diagnosis. Our modern therapeutic strategies, better management of conventional treatments and new drugs have obviously improved outcomes. Now, clinicians strive not only to enhance survival with adapted therapies, but also to prevent the occurrence of late complications, which can be the consequence of the diseases, their etiology and/or treatment.
The vasculitis story is not yet finished. It is likely that, in the near future, new vasculitides or vasculitis phenotypes will be described, etiologies will be identified, mechanisms will be better understood, and treatments will be more-and-more codified and adapted to disease forms. Genetic studies, still unknown research technologies and new drugs will certainly participate in this progress.

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