



Cancer and the hope of genetic medicine

Knowledge of individual genetic risks and of external risk factors is expected to lead to the prediction and ultimate prevention of cancer, and to successful treatment.

The visibility and meaning of hereditary and other genetic factors in cancer have varied over time.

CANCER AND GENETICS: WAVES OF HOPE AND FEAR

Implications for medicine and society

From 1880 onwards cancer was widely seen as a possible, but not necessary, outcome of a hereditary predisposition, dependent on the role of environmental factors.

The idiom of heredity when associated with shame, fatalism and stigmatization could be counterproductive to the campaign for prevention and early detection of cancer.

Notions of plasticity of heredity went together with flexible prevention and treatment practices.

In the past reproduction control has been proposed as preventive intervention for 'cancer families'.

Highly-targeted cancer surveillance and tailored treatment programs can lead to new forms of stigmatization of 'at-risk' groups.

Recently a new dimension has been added: prognostic indicators of tumor-DNA.



Exploring historical data and experiences

Studying historical trends helps us to develop insight in the current dynamics of coping with genetics, cancer and other diseases.



Research (2004-2006):

Stephen Snelders

Project leaders:

Toine Pieters, Frans J. Meijman,
Neil K. Aaronson, Floor E van
Leeuwen

Contact: T Pieters, VU University
Medical Centre Amsterdam,
Department of Medical
Humanities (Metamedica), PO
Box 7057 1007 MB Amsterdam,
a.pieters@vumc.nl