



Preface

Clinical management of premalignant disorders of the gastrointestinal tract



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There are exciting prospects for the prevention and early diagnosis of premalignant disorders of the digestive system. We are learning a great deal about the mechanisms involved in the development of malignancy and are increasingly recognizing the precursors of cancer. There is much promise in screening for cancer and evaluating markers of malignancy, but there are also epidemiologic, methodologic, and ethical concerns.

The increasing recognition of Barrett's esophagus and the expanding occurrence of adenocarcinoma of the esophagus are prime examples of the challenge of managing gastrointestinal premalignant disease. Much is known about the epidemiology, molecular and genetic mechanisms, and clinical factors, but we still have not been able to control this seeming epidemic.

Infectious, dietary, immunologic, and environmental factors are all involved in the causation of malignancy of the digestive tract. Dietary change and drugs may prevent cancer but certainly much work is yet to be done. The early detection and treatment of premalignant lesions and the recognition of genetic predisposition hopefully will reduce cancer mortality. Other gastrointestinal diseases increase the risk of cancer, and we need to know more about the factors predisposing to malignancy and the appropriate roles of treatment and surveillance.

Our goal is to eliminate cancer of the digestive tract, and the clinical management of premalignant lesions is discussed in this issue. We are grateful to all the authors who have contributed to this effort. Thanks to our editor,

Kerry Holland, who has been most patient and diligent, and to Jeanne Myers and Dianna Mills who helped in the preparation of this issue. This issue provides current knowledge and points out the need for continuing investigation.

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