



Monday Morning Practice Pearls #29

Where did the Cooperative Groups Go?

Historical Perspective

In 1955, Dr. Sydney Farber, Mary Lasker, and others, requested an increase in support for cancer chemotherapy research. In April 1955, Congress awarded NCI \$5 million to establish the Cancer Chemotherapy National Service Center (CCNSC) with the purpose of coordinating the first national, voluntary, cooperative cancer chemotherapy program. This was the beginning of the cooperative group approach to research. The first group was the Acute Leukemia Chemotherapy Cooperative Study Group A (ALCCSGA) focusing on pediatric leukemia. The group's first clinical trial ran from 1955-1956 and compared 6-MP to 6-MP plus azaserine.

Through Phase III cooperative group clinical trials, many new standards of care evolved. Here are just a few of the outcomes:

- Long-term survival and cures in the majority of pediatric cancer cases
- Demonstrated that breast-conserving lumpectomy is often a better surgical option than radical mastectomy
- Developed optimal adjuvant chemotherapy regimens for breast cancer
- Demonstrated the preventative benefits of tamoxifen for breast cancer
- Developed paclitaxel (Taxol) as a premier treatment of ovarian cancer and metastatic non-small-cell lung cancer
- Demonstrated 12 months of fluorouracil/levamisole (Ergamisol) chemotherapy decreased mortality in colon cancer by 33%, and in a follow-up study, demonstrated that the same benefit could be realized by 6 months of fluorouracil/leucovorin
- Showed that radiation combined with cisplatin-based chemotherapy as first-line treatment significantly increased 3- and 7-year survival in non-small-cell lung cancer

The location of the CCNSC within NCI and the funding mechanism changed over the years and was about to change again in 2014.

NCI National Clinical Trials Network (NCTN)

On March 1, 2014, after several years of consultation and coordination with many stakeholders, NCI transformed its Cooperative Group program into the new [National Clinical Trials Network \(NCTN\)](#). The restructuring of the cooperative groups was partly a response from the Institute of Medicine (IOM) (2010) to strengthen and streamline operations among NCI clinical trials cooperative group programs. Guided by the IOM recommendations, the design and implementation of the NCTN also incorporated feedback from Cooperative Group investigators, NCI Comprehensive Cancer Center directors, several NCI working groups, leading cancer researchers, industry representatives, and patient advocates. The nine former adult

Cooperative Groups have consolidated into four adult groups with a continued focus on childhood cancers and the inclusions of a Canadian Collaborating Clinical Trials Network. See the table below for the current and merged groups.

| NCTN | Merged Cooperative Groups |
|---|--|
| Alliance for Clinical Trials in Oncology (formed March 2011) | American College of Surgeons Oncology Group (ACOSOG) + Cancer and Acute Leukemia Group B (CALGB) + North Central Cancer Treatment Group (NCCTG) |
| ECOG-ACRIN Cancer Research Group (formed May 2012) | Eastern Cooperative Oncology Group (ECOG) + American College of Radiology Imaging Network (ACRIN) |
| NRG Oncology (formed January 2013) | National Surgical Adjuvant Breast & Bowel Project (NSABP) + Radiation Therapy Oncology Group (RTOG) + Gynecologic Oncology Group (GOG) |
| Southwest Oncology Group (SWOG) | N/A |
| National Cancer Institute of Canada, Clinical Trials Group (NCIC-CTG) | N/A |
| Children's Oncology Group (COG) | N/A 2000 merger of the Children's Cancer Group (CCG), the Pediatric Oncology Group (POG), the Intergroup Rhabdomyosarcoma Study Group (IRSG), and the National Wilms' Tumor Study Group (NWTSG) |