

FOREWORD

Cancers of the gastrointestinal tract remain a major challenge for oncologists and other cancer specialists in the United States and worldwide. This volume on the evaluation and treatment of patients with gastrointestinal malignancies represents an important milestone in the M. D. Anderson Cancer Center Series on the multidisciplinary management of cancer. Gastrointestinal cancers exemplify the importance of multidisciplinary management in modern oncologic care. Contributors to the management of patients with the spectrum of diseases that emanate from the gastrointestinal tract include pathologists, radiologists, surgical oncologists, radiation oncologists, medical oncologists, and others. It is the close interaction and interplay between these highly trained specialists that result in the improving care of patients with these challenging diseases. In the following chapters, gastrointestinal oncology specialists at M. D. Anderson Cancer Center describe the state of the art in the multidisciplinary management of diseases developing from all parts of the gastrointestinal tract.

Increasingly, we are recognizing that many gastrointestinal malignancies have a strong inherited component. In many cases, the early recognition of patients at high risk for specific preneoplastic processes involving the gastrointestinal tract—such as Barrett’s esophagus and colonic polypoidosis—represents an important opportunity to prevent the emergence of neoplasia. Optimizing prevention strategies remains our best hope for eradicating gastrointestinal cancers as an important cause of cancer-related deaths in the United States.

Each of the malignancies discussed in the 20 chapters of this monograph has specific highly unique features. Tailored to the unique natural history of each malignancy, the management of these diseases varies considerably. Despite the progress being made, a great deal of work remains to be done to understand the basic molecular biology of gastrointestinal malignancies. It is this knowledge that will be crucial for the development of new therapeutics and new opportunities for screening and early diagnosis for gastrointestinal cancers. We believe that readers of this volume will be impressed at the dramatic improvements that are being made with these difficult cancers.

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