

# *The TNM Pocket Book on Classification of Malignant Tumours*

The International Union Against Cancer (U.I.C.C.) has always given special attention to the problem of the clinical classification of malignant tumours. The practice of dividing cancer cases into groups according to so called stages arose from the known fact that the crude survival or apparent recovery rates were higher for cases in which the disease was localized than for those in which the disease had extended beyond the organ of origin.

These groups are often referred to as "early" or "late" cases, erroneously implying some regular progression with time. In fact the stage of disease at the time of diagnosis may be a reflection not only of the rate of growth and extension of the neoplasm but also of the type of tumour, the tumour-host relationship, and the interval of time between the first symptom or sign recognized by the patient and the time of diagnosis or treatment. These complex interrelationships are an obstacle to any perfect classification. Though this is a different concept from staging it is equally a challenge to the recording of precise information on the extent of the disease. This will make possible a clinical description which may serve a number of related objectives. These are, briefly, to aid the clinician in the planning of treatment, in making a prognosis, in assisting in the evaluation of the results of treatment, and facilitating the exchange of information between centres and individual specialists.

The principles of the TNM system are straightforward. The initial letter stand for: T the tumour, N the regional lymph nodes, and M distant metastases. Numbers are added to these three letters to indicate a progression in the extent of the malignant process and provide in effect a kind of shorthand notation of the particular tumour to be recorded. The purpose of TNM is to define categories for all cases, however advanced when first seen, and also to allow subsequent and more detailed information to be added without changing the original description of the tumour.

The policy of the U.I.C.C. is that the classification of any site should be adopted for a trial period of five years, after which time criticisms of the classifications and proposed modifications should be submitted to the Committee for discussions.

The Pocket Book contains the description of the principles of the TNM system and brings together for the first time the classifications of 24 sites.

There are still difficulties to be overcome and it is possible that some of the definitions for various sites may require alteration in years to come.