Foreword

Biological specimens collected, processed, and stored under optimal conditions increasingly provide a necessary foundation for cancer research. Information obtained from such samples opens opportunities to learn more about the causes, prevention, and treatment of the disease. International comparisons made possible by the study of sample collections from different parts of the world are also invaluable in the pursuit of the evidence base for cancer control.

However, the above-mentioned opportunities are accompanied by many challenges and potential pitfalls. At times, pragmatic decisions have to be made in response to the constraints faced when conducting clinical or population-based studies. These constraints may be technical, may relate to infrastructure or finance, or may be ethical, legal, or social in nature. Being unaware of these types of risk to successful biobanking can place important scientific advances in jeopardy.

In this context, it is a great pleasure to introduce this publication from the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC). The purpose of the text is to provide clear and practical advice on the common practices needed to create and maintain biobanks, recognizing that the circumstances faced by the curators of biobanks vary across the world. The international cooperation that went into formulating these Common Minimal Technical Standards provides confidence that the content is realistic, while at the same time maintaining the minimal standards needed in order for the biospecimens to be valid and to yield the reliable research data being sought. In providing this Foreword, I would like to place on record my thanks to all authors and reviewers who have contributed to this final product, as well as to all the contributors to *Common Minimum Technical Standards and Protocols for Biological Resource Centres Dedicated to Cancer Research*, known as the "Green Book", published by IARC in 2007.

In publishing this book, my hope is for a balanced focus, not only on what goes into a biobank but also on what comes out. There is a risk that biobanks remain untouched or underexploited, a deposit that is rarely put to work for the common good. While this book aims to ensure that what goes into a biobank is of high quality and well managed, it has as its ultimate objective to drive the use of those same biospecimens in research. This will involve the analysis of biospecimens, but to maximize the benefits it will also require linkage to other well-documented epidemiological and clinical data sets. In this period of spiralling numbers of cancer cases and costs of cancer care, the failure to use stored samples to answer critical research questions is indefensible.

In conclusion, I trust that readers will find this publication to be a support to successful biobanking and will find herein one important foundation for cancer research in the 21st century.

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