

## Farewell to four greats

As we begin a new year with optimistic anticipation of further achievements in oncology, we must pause to pay tribute to four major innovators and mentors who sadly died at the start of 2019.

On Jan 2, Professor Waun Ki Hong, a pioneering physician and scientist at the MD Anderson Cancer Center (Houston, TX, USA), died aged 76. Until he retired in 2014, he was head of the centre's Division of Cancer Medicine. His work contributed to notable advances in chemoprevention, organ preservation in laryngeal cancer, and personalised targeted therapy.

Professor Bertrand Coiffier, who also died on Jan 2, aged 71, was a leading lymphoma expert, who focused on developing new drug regimens to improve outcomes for aggressive lymphoma. He was a Professor of Hematology at the Hospices Civils de Lyon and the University Claude Bernard (Lyon, France), and was a founding member and President of the Groupe d'Etude des Lymphomes de l'Adulte, which later merged with another group to form the world-renowned Lymphoma Study Association.

On Jan 7, Professor John Mendelsohn, a former president of the MD Anderson Cancer Center, died from glioblastoma, aged 82. During his 15-year tenure at MD Anderson, he championed huge improvements in the centre's facilities, revenue, numbers of patients, and private philanthropy contributions. He helped to develop the monoclonal antibody cetuximab, which is used to treat colorectal, head and neck, and lung cancers.

Martin Gore, Professor of Cancer Medicine at the Institute of Cancer Research and Medical Director at the Royal Marsden Hospital (London, UK), died suddenly on Jan 10 aged 67, reportedly after a yellow fever vaccination. He was an internationally renowned oncologist, with notable contributions to research in melanoma, ovarian and renal cancers, and was a pioneer in immunotherapy. He received a CBE in the Queen's 2016 birthday honours list for services to oncology.

As we reflect on the untimely loss of these four inspirational, leading oncologists, this has been a sad—and unprecedented—way to start 2019. ■ *The Lancet Oncology*



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## Big influences on anti-obesity strategies

Obesity, the second biggest preventable cause of cancer after tobacco smoking, is a major public health problem worldwide. Governments must take steps to address this issue; however, recent reports suggest that China's anti-obesity policies are being influenced by external players.

Increasingly westernised diets, escalating rural-to-urban migration, and sedentary lifestyles have caused China's obesity levels to more than double since 1991. Over 42% of adults, and nearly a fifth of all children living in cities, are now obese. In response, the Chinese Government has launched several public health campaigns, including 'Happy 10 Minutes', which encourages schoolchildren to have daily 10-min breaks for exercise. However, these strategies have paid seemingly little, if any, attention to diet. Why?

According to recent studies in the *BMJ* and *The Journal of Public Health Policy*, the Chinese Government's attempts to tackle obesity are being supported by several large multinational food companies, including Coca-Cola, Pepsi-Cola, and Nestlé. These companies fund a non-profit research organisation, the International Life

Sciences Institute (ILSI), originally established in the USA in 1978 by a Coca-Cola executive. For several decades, ILSI-China has led public health initiatives emphasising the importance of exercise and physical activity—rather than nutrition—as key to solving the obesity problem. By focusing more on physical activity than on a healthy diet, attention is diverted away from highly processed food and calorie-dense snacks and drinks. Shaping public health policy in this way could help the funding companies to protect sales of their own products and potentially avoid food regulations, advertising rules, and sugar taxes that have been introduced elsewhere.

However, diet is clearly crucial. As highlighted in the recent *Lancet-EAT* and *Lancet Obesity* Commissions, overconsumption of unhealthy foods is driving poor health and associated non-communicable diseases worldwide. Governments must not allow their public health strategies to be unduly influenced by powerful multinationals who might be more concerned with protecting their own interests than helping to solve this ongoing health crisis. ■ *The Lancet Oncology*



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For the *BMJ* report see *BMJ* 2019; 364: k5050.

For the *The Journal of Public Health Policy* study see *J Public Health Pol* 2019; published online Jan 9. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41271-018-00158-x>

For the *Lancet-EAT Commission* see *Lancet* 2019; published online Jan 16. DOI:10.1016/S0140-6736(18)31788-4

For the *Lancet Obesity Commission* see *Lancet* 2019; published online Jan 27. DOI: 10.1016/S0140-6736(18)32822-8