

Foreword

Sudhir Srivastava

Cancer Biomarkers Research Group, National Cancer Institute, Bethesda, MD 20892, USA
Editor in Chief

The NCI's Early Detection Research Network (EDRN) structure and function provide a unique approach to translational research that is not readily accomplished through other mechanisms. The structure engages highly successful, independent, academic, peer reviewed scientists in a process of discovery and validation that requires deep collaboration. The EDRN attracts excellent academic and industry scientists by providing access to diverse top-quality scientific (assays), clinical specimens, methodological expertise, industrial resources, and financial resources that are not organized or are not readily available through other governmentally based or industry based funding mechanisms. The collection of abstracts from its 4th Annual Workshop held in Philadelphia from 20–22 March 2006, speaks for the diversity of the approaches, technologies, and studies focused toward translating biomarkers into clinical application. Progress reflected through these abstracts testifies that the EDRN is successfully building and implementing a vertically integrated pipeline of biomarkers for cancer early detection and risk assessment.

EDRN is also addressing an important “culture challenge” that is inherent to the academic system. The current system emphasizes individual achievement over collaborative work. For biomarker discovery and validation the current academic system is fragmented and unlikely to succeed. While these culture barriers have caused delays and slowed progress, a collaborative environment of scientific innovation linked to excellence in translational research is emerging. The work of growing a cohesive culture of sharing remains on track. Investigators continue to see the EDRN as a place wherein the products of this research can be brought for validation and generalization. Investigators have fully engaged the EDRN resource, generating extensive collaborative research, opening the pathway to translation of innovative technologies to validation and generalization to the public. Consequently, the EDRN's portfolio of biomarkers is now expanding as indicated in the number of abstracts presented in the meeting.