

Division of Hematology and Hematologic Malignancies History

By Dr. Ben Ruether
(Hematologist 1969 – 2007)

The Division of Hematology and Hematologic Malignancies initially was formed in 1980 as the Division of Hematology/Oncology, and included Clinical Hematologists, Medical Hematologists, and Radiation Oncologists. Subsequently, and with the establishment of a Medical Oncology Training Program in 1985, a separate Division of Medical Oncology was established and the Division became the Division of Hematology and Hematologic Malignancies. Responsibilities of the Division included provision of hematology laboratory and blood transfusion services, as well as provision of clinical services in all aspects of benign and malignant hematologic disorders and bone marrow transplantation. Members of the Division included those from the Foothills Hospital as well as those with primary clinical activity at the Calgary General Hospital, later the Peter Lougheed Hospital who also provided consultations to the Holy Cross Hospital and Rockyview Hospital. Virtually all members of the Division have held appointments at the Calgary Cancer Clinic and later the Tom Baker Cancer Centre. Directorship and clinical services have also been provided to the Southern Alberta Hemophilia Program. Consulting services have been provided to the Regional Blood Transfusion Program of the Canadian Blood Services.

Prior to the establishment of formal divisions with the Department of Internal Medicine, and prior to the establishment of a medical school in Calgary, hematologic and medical oncologic services were provided largely by internists and Dr. Eric Nation, who directed Blood Transfusion Services as well as carrying a busy clinical practice. He added the Foothills site to his clinical base and took on teaching responsibilities with establishment of the medical school. Dr. Ben Ruether joined the Department of Medicine in 1969 and undertook, together with Dr. Nation, the hematologic clinical services at the Foothills Hospital. He was also asked to direct and service the hematology laboratories and blood transfusion laboratory. At the Calgary General Hospital, clinical services were provided by Dr. Andrew Padmos and later by Dr. Graham Pineo, who filled the role of Chief of Internal Medicine there.

Subsequent recruitment was aimed at attracting individuals with particular expertise in various aspects of hematology and hematologic malignancies. Clinical and laboratory hematologists recruited who subsequently left the Division for opportunities in other centres were Dr. Andrew Kaegi, Dr. M. Morrisuddin, Dr. Berend Houwen and Dr. Richard Woodman. Dr. Ben Ruether was the first Division Chief, followed by Dr. Man-Chiu Poon.

With consolidation of regional clinical laboratory services, Dr. David Easton moved from the Calgary General Hospital to the Foothills site and took over the Directorship of the Hematology Laboratory and Blood Transfusion. By this time, hematology laboratory services had been expanded under the supervision of Dr. Man-Chiu Poon to include molecular diagnostics, flow Cytometry, and tertiary level coagulation testing. Since 2007, hematologists have provided all morphologic interpretation. Dr. Man-Chiu Poon continues activities in special coagulation, special hematology, and molecular diagnostics.

The Division established a Clinical Training Program in 1983. Many trainees have subsequently joined the Division and participate in all aspects of its activities.

Early in the Division's development, research consisted primarily of involvement in advanced clinical trials. Subsequently, with growth of the Division, clinical trial activity has expanded to include earlier trial work in hematologic malignancies and basic research. Dr. Man-Chiu Poon has received national and international recognition for his work in hemostasis and additionally his work in international outreach programs in hemophilia. The innovative clinical trial work of the Thrombosis Research Unit under Drs. Graham Pineo and Russell Hull is also internationally recognized.

From its onset, teaching has been a particular strength of the Division, receiving many accolades from medical students for the delivery of the Reticuloendothelial Course (subsequently renamed the Blood Course) to first year students. Dr. Allan Jones served as an Associate Dean of Undergraduate Medical Education.

One mark of the Division's impact has been the success of the Hematology Research and Education Fund, which families and friends of patients contribute to, and which has been most helpful in aiding the Division's research and education activities.

In the face of rapid changes and growth, the Division has maintained among its members a noteworthy spirit of cooperation and collegiality, which has been instrumental in attracting new members from its own fellows to pursue careers in Calgary.