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**Introduction**

In the 1860's, two anatomists, Carl Thiersch and Wilhelm Waldeyer, proved that epithelial tumors arise only from epithelial cells. Their findings not only disproved Virchow's connective tissue cell theory of the origin of cancer but furnished the data from which James Ewing established his histogenetic classification of tumors in 1919. Ewing systematically arranged tumors into groups. He gathered the information provided by previous investigators, sifted it with his own careful observations and formulated classifications of tumors based on histogenesis. He asserted that only such a classification would allow a definition of tumor types and provide understanding of the natural history of each tumor. He realized, more than any other earlier observer, that human cancer is many diseases with differing patterns of behavior: his work opened the way to therapy based on tumor type and stage of disease. The same painstaking attention to detail and clarity of thought which produced his book, *Neoplastic Diseases*\* is dramatically evident in his original description of nonosteogenic tumor of bone (reprinted below). The report was published in 1921 and brought him sharp criticism. There was general agreement that a tumor with the

clinical and radiographic features described by Ewing existed, but some believed that it failed to satisfy the criteria of a pathological entity. In more recent years his contention that the tumor was a diffuse endothelioma has been supported.

James Ewing was born on Christmas Day, 1866 in Pittsburgh, attended Amherst College and the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Columbia University and interned during the 1890's at Roosevelt Hospital in New York City with Dr. Francis Delafield. He became the first Professor of Pathology at Cornell University Medical School and at the age of 33 he became chairman of the newly organized department and occupied that chair until 1932.

Dr. Ewing was convinced that the progress of cancer research was inextricably bound with the development of a cancer research hospital, where research could be directly applied to the treatment of human cancer. At the time he was conducting laboratory studies at Cornell he befriended James Douglas, a mining engineer and president of the Phelps Dodge Corporation. Mr. Douglas' daughter had died of cancer, and he, in his desire to be of benefit to cancer patients, became intrigued with the therapeutic possibilities of radium, which at that time was in short supply in the United States. Douglas

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\*Ewing, James: *Neoplastic Diseases*. Philadelphia: W. B. Saunders Company, 1919. 1027 pp.

wanted experiments with radium therapy conducted in America and turned to the Memorial Hospital (originally founded as the New York Cancer Hospital). He formed a nonprofit corporation for the development of American pitchblende deposits, provided funds for research at the Memorial Hospital and built a laboratory. When the Hospital was first affiliated with Cornell, Ewing was elected president of the medical board. He became director of research and pathologist at Memorial. Later, upon his retirement from Cornell, he was made director of Memorial Hospital for Cancer and Allied Diseases.

While at Memorial, Ewing stressed the use of radiation therapy to determine the radiosensitivity of different forms of cancer. His paper on diffuse endothelioma of bone illustrates one of these efforts. The work done at Memorial under his direction provided important criteria for choosing methods of cancer therapy — irradiation, surgery or a combination of both.

Ewing's book, *Neoplastic Diseases*, first published in 1919, is a classic on the subject and renewed the interest in the United States of pathologists and clinicians in tumor pathology. He was esteemed by his colleagues and staff, who referred to him as "The Chief." His students at Cornell recorded and published his last lecture. Even after his retirement at the age of 73, he visited his laboratory daily, and during his final illness was engaged in a study of the medicolegal aspects of cancer.

His influence on those who studied with him was profound. Two of his associates, Dr. Fred Stewart and Dr. Frank Foote, successively headed the Pathology Department of Memorial Hospital and are identified among the outstanding tumor pathologists of the world not only for their many significant

contributions but also because they, in turn, served as the mentors of distinguished tumor pathologists now chairing pathology departments elsewhere.

In the first chapter of his book, Dr. Ewing gives what is perhaps the best description of his contribution to modern oncology: "The 20th century opens as . . . the period of specific etiological investigation which promises to widely separate many neoplastic diseases formerly held to be closely related . . . [and] may thereby prove to be the era of successful therapeutics and prophylaxis."

Dr. Ewing died on May 16, 1943 of cancer.—EDITOR.