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THE GERMLINE SUGGESTS CANCER IS PHYSIOLOGIC

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The current effort in oncology is directed at uncovering tumor expressed genes and mutations. The thrust of “personalized oncology” is to uncover the unique signature of each tumor and to treat it accordingly. The view from the germline is quite different. Germline SNPs associated with breast, colon, lung, ovary, pancreas and prostate tumors reveal snow fields but not snowflakes. Not only do patients with the same pathologic diagnosis share SNPs, but these SNPs are shared by multiple tumors. Blockbuster drugs are to be expected, with effects on multiple cancers. Furthermore, the sheer number of involved genes (on the order of 10,000, or 1/3-1/2 of the genome) suggests that a large cellular program is involved in tumorigenesis. Differentiation comes readily to mind. Their 5000 germline SNPs appear to give them a recipe for differentiation therapy, useful for late stage disease, as well as a way to predict which tumor a person will get.