Molecular mechanisms in colon cancer

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Citation for published version (APA):

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Acknowledgements
Acknowledgements

What is an Englishman doing here in Amsterdam? This is a question I have frequently ended up trying to answer during my time in the Lab at the AMC. How it came about is a long story, but one that figures most of those who I wish to thank for my stimulating time at the Laboratory of Experimental Internal Medicine.

In 1995 I decided, after 3 gruelling years as a junior doctor in the UK, that it was time for a change of scene and I applied for a job with the humanitarian aid agency Médecins sans Frontières (MSF) to work as an emergency aid doctor. MSF UK is a recruitment office for MSF Holland, so my first contact with the Dutch was working for MSF Holland in Azerbaijan. My ties to Holland became more intimate through meeting Eva Mireille while in Central Asia and she moved with me to London for a couple of years while I began my Specialist Gastroenterology training. During this time I visited the AMC for a live endoscopy course and first became interested in the possibility of undertaking the research part of my training at the AMC. It soon became apparent that two years amongst the eccentric English was as much as a Dutch girl can take, and hence I looked further into working at the AMC and moving to Holland. Thus it is to my wife Eva Mireille that I owe my greatest thanks.

For advice about who to approach at the AMC and how, I contacted Ivo, a fellow participant in a curiously British yearly sporting event involving a motley selection of runners in a one day long 80 mile relay race along one of the more precipitous of the long distance walking paths around England. Ivo has since been a stalwart running companion during my time at the AMC and has tried to introduce me to the beauty of the polder landscape, something not immediately apparent to an Englishman, and has agreed to act as one of my ‘paranymphs’.

A letter enquiring about the possibilities of research at the AMC lead eventually to my making a very brief email enquiry to Sander van Deventer and, typically, received an even shorter positive reply. Prepared for a searching interview as to why I wanted to work at the AMC and what my qualifications were, my job interview with Sander lasted all of two minutes whereupon I was introduced to Maikel Peppelenbosch. I’m thus much indebted to Sanders’ lightning appraisal of me and subsequent support and interest in this thesis.

I owe special thanks to Maikel for entrusting me with his hard-won funding and giving me the chance to follow some of my own ideas while providing a veritable fountain of his own married with an unwavering optimism so vital in research to counterbalance my British tendency to cynicism. Maikel took me on a brief tour of the Lab facilities and then left me in
the hands of Gijs who proceeded to show me, in his pleasantly manic way, the essence of some of the bewildering array of projects that he was busy with. As co-author of all the articles in this thesis, critical sounding-board and unbridled source of enthusiasm I am very fortunate to have been able to work with Gijs.

Leaving full time clinical medicine in London on Friday evening and beginning full time basic research in Amsterdam on Monday morning was in retrospect more of a shock than I had imagined. The transition was made easier by the warm welcome I received at the Lab and by everyone’s consideration in speaking English around me while I understood no Dutch. I was soon taken in hand by Gijs, Bernt, Henri and Maikel for an initiation evening in the salubrious atmosphere of the ‘Oude Gasthuis’ where I sadly failed to live up to the Dutch expectations of British ale-quaffing abilities. Nevertheless I was lucky to be considered fit for an introduction by Bernt and Gijs to the delights of an evening at the ‘Sociëteit’ and am indebted to them for a thorough ‘inburgerings cursus’ (introduction to Dutch society) that would have satisfied the late P. Fortuyn.

What began as one year of research, possibly two, has stretched to three and a half and I’ve had the chance to complete a full PhD thesis. I have learned a lot about research and Holland and enjoyed my time at the lab. Here I should particularly like to thank the rest of Maikels sub-group and all our many students. I’ve also enjoyed being part of the larger lab and joining in the friendly banter of the AIO kamer.

I’d like to thank my mother and father for their support and understanding in being separated from their only grandchild, even if by only a short hop over the North Sea, and my Dutch mother and father in law.