Introduction

The Fourth International Workshop on Human Gene Mapping was held in Winnipeg from August 14 to 18, 1977, sponsored by The National Foundation—March of Dimes and the University of Manitoba as one of the events of its Centennial year. Previous workshops in this series were held at Yale University in 1973, Erasmus University, Rotterdam, in 1974, and Johns Hopkins University in 1975.

The objectives of this series of meetings were stated in the introduction to the New Haven Conference (1973):

“In any new field where information and concepts are accumulating and changing rapidly, it is important to regularly evaluate progress and chart new directions of advance. That is the purpose of these annual meetings and published reports. It is our aim to review progress on human gene mapping on a yearly basis. This will permit us to confirm valid gene assignments and identify others which require confirmation or reanalysis. The meetings should provide a standard terminology and nomenclature which will facilitate future developments. Annual meetings will also provide a forum for the exchange of new concepts and methodologies. Thus, in general, such meetings can

serve to contribute to the more orderly advance of human gene mapping.”

These objectives remain true today, and each workshop has provided a valuable forum for discussion and clarification of new ideas, the shaping of directions of progress, confirmation of new assignments, and generally serving to facilitate progress in the area of human gene mapping. Those who have participated in each of these meetings will, I believe, agree that they have served their functions well.

The first three meetings were held annually; at the third it was decided that in the future these meetings should be held biennially because it was thought that there had been some slight reduction in the rate at which new information was becoming available. The format of the Winnipeg meeting differed from previous meetings in that no short papers were presented, and all of the material was available in poster form to participants and committee chairmen for the duration of the meeting. This allowed a larger volume of material to be presented and led to a more critical appraisal of material by the committees.

The magnitude of the present volume attests to the continuing advance that has taken place since 1975, with no fewer than 10 separate committee reports summarizing the data in each of their respective areas and over 130 individual short contributions.* In addition, the present volume departs from its predecessors in that two of the longer papers presented at the plenary session are reproduced. An attempt has been made, as agreed at the Winnipeg meeting, to avoid duplication of papers published or in press elsewhere, and it has not always been easy for the editorial board to determine which should be published and which should not. We would like to express our appreciation to authors for their cooperation in this matter. Where duplication was considered to
Another change introduced into the committee reports is the introduction of a new concept in reporting data, namely, the “smallest region of overlap” (SRO), and as this concept is developed, it will to some degree replace the terms “confirmed” and “provisional” as attached to regional assignments in previous reports.

There are still many problems relating to nomenclature, and it is hoped that many of these can be resolved prior to the 1979 meeting in Edinburgh. In addition, with the volume of data now available, it is hoped that a suitable format for computerization of the human gene map can shortly be agreed upon for discussion and approval at the 1979 meeting. As a result of these and other problems, and despite the excellent work of Drs. McAlpine and Shows, inconsistencies in nomenclature and presentation no doubt remain. We hope that the reader will bear with these and that they will not detract from the value of this volume. It is to be hoped that those involved in this field and others with an interest in the human gene map will find this volume a useful summary of the state of the art at the end of 1977.

In conclusion, I should like personally to express my appreciation to all those who helped in the organization of the Winnipeg meeting and in the production of this volume. In particular, I should like to express my thanks to members of the local organizing committee and to my secretary at that time, Ms. Barbara Chaika, who carried out much of the detailed organization of the meeting. Much of the organization of the present volume, the collection and collation of the material, communication with the authors, and all the other details that are involved in the organization of a volume of this complexity have fallen onto the shoulders of my present secretary, Ms. Nargis Paroo, and I should like to express my sincere appreciation for the way in which she has carried out this work.

John L. Hamerton