Preface

This volume contains the contributions of a symposium held during the 2nd Joint Winter Meeting of the Society for the Study of Fertility (SSF) and the German Society for the Study of Fertility and Sterility (DGSFS; now German Society for Reproductive Medicine, DGRM) at Rolduc, Netherlands, from December 18 to 19, 1998. We have chosen this topic as we felt that current knowledge on the zona pellucida and the early embryonic coats should be presented as coherent subjects and result in a comprehensive overview. The articles of this issue underline the importance of embryonic coats during mammalian fertilization, as well as the morphological and biochemical changes of these extracellular matrices by oviductal, uterine and embryonic proteins. Beside the physiological dynamics of the structure of embryonic coats, their clinical significance is discussed. Although only a few research groups have investigated mammalian embryonic coats, knowledge in this area has increased tremendously during recent years. It has become increasingly clear that knowledge of the physiology/pathology of the embryonic coats is very important for the understanding of early embryonic development and may lead to new insights, improving IVF therapy and in vitro culture techniques.

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