Foreword

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Over the past years our knowledge on the physiology, pathobiology and treatment of pancreatic diseases has increased substantially. Despite this progress, many aspects remain controversial and treatment modalities are still a matter of debate. In this overview we would like to focus on different practical problems with which every physician, who is dealing with pancreatic diseases, is confronted daily.

The risk factors for developing chronic pancreatitis and the natural history has been reviewed by R. Munch. Alcohol remains not only the main risk factor, at least in developed western countries, but is also the most frequent cause of persistent chronic pain which remains a challenge for every clinician and surgeon, as discussed by

H.G. Gooszen. Patients should not be withheld from the surgeon, until the chronic pancreatitis has burned out and been replaced by problems of pancreatic insufficiency. The basic aspects of physiology in chronic pancreatitis are discussed by Ch. Beglinger.

Prognostic uncertainty upon admission of patients with acute pancreatitis hampers correct treatment. In the past years computer tomography has proven to be of great help to recognize patients at risk for developing life-threatening complications and to follow patients during acute disease, a topic addressed by P. Meyer and co-workers. In addition, endo-scopic retrograde cholangi-ography with papillotomy may be necessary if a common bile duct stone is suspected and the course of the disease does not improve spontaneously during the first 48 h. Although this approach is still a matter of debate, different theoretical and clinical evaluations support the strategy as concluded by U. Marbet. The role of surgery in pancreatic disease has been critically discussed by M. Büchler and co-workers. The surgical removal of contaminated necrotic material in patients with local septic complications following acute pancreatitis is widely accepted. In single patients with fulminant disease, even surgical intervention during the first 3-5 days may be of benefit.

We hope that these practically oriented reviews contribute to a better understanding and management of pancreatic diseases.