Preface

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This supplement summarizes the results of the Tokyo Conference of Reproductive Physiology carried out August 31, 1996, to consider the issue of apoptosis in ovarian and endometrial function.

Recent progress in basic research on apoptosis has greatly contributed to investigations of apoptotic cell death during physiological cyclic changes in the ovary and uterus. In addition to the original morphological characteristics observed by electron microscopy, the genes and regulatory molecules involved in apoptosis have been clarified, and it has become possible to study this process using several distinctive molecular biology techniques. The aim of the conference was to understand the cellular and molecular events in apoptosis in contrast to necrosis, and to clarify the physiological significance of apoptosis in reproductive physiology. Cumulative results indicate that the occurrence of apoptotic cell death is inevitable in the cells of the ovary and endometrium at certain stages of differentiation, including follicular atresia, luteolysis, and induction of menstruation. Present data strongly suggests that apoptosis plays an important key role in regulation of the function of these reproductive organs. Therefore, further studies are necessary to elucidate the relationship between apoptosis and the expression of regulatory molecules in the ovary and endometrium including peptide and sex steroid hormones, growth factors, cytokines, etc. We hope that these proceedings will refresh update knowledge obtained in the conference and contribute to further research endeavors.

We would like to thank all invited speakers and participants of the conference for their excellent presentations and active discussions which made the conference a great success. We would also like to express our particular thanks to Sandoz Pharmaceuticals Ltd, whose sponsorship enabled us to hold the conference and to publish this supplement.

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