Preface

Our knowledge of the etiology and pathogenesis of inflammatory diseases of the gastrointestinal tract has made major advances over the past several decades. The clinical phenotype of chronic inflammatory intestinal diseases is highly variable, the most common forms being ulcerative colitis and Crohn's disease. These diseases – inflammatory bowel diseases (IBDs) – represent a relevant group within medicine. Treatment is often demanding since young patients are often affected with severe clinical manifestations, and treatment modalities become more and more complex.

Advances in understanding IBDs have arisen from research involving experimental models of intestinal inflammation or the study of tissues and cells obtained from patients. Data from clinical studies of patients and their responses to various forms of treatment as well as from environmental and genetic studies of large patient cohorts likewise contributed to this knowledge. These advances have led to a deeper understanding of the genetic basis of the disease, the relationship of the disease to the intestinal microflora, and the role of epithelial cells and the mucosal immune system in disease pathogenesis. On this basis a general theory of disease causation is emerging, interpreting IBD as a multifactorial disturbance of mucosal homeostasis leading to hyperresponsiveness of both the innate and the adaptive elements of the mucosal immune system. In addition, on this basis more specific and effective therapy options have been developed.

In May 2009, the Falk Foundation provided the framework for an international Symposium entitled 'Inflammation in the Intestinal Tract: Pathogenesis and Treatment' that was dedicated to an in-depth review of current research and clinical management of inflammatory diseases of the intestinal tract. The organizers were gastroenterologists and surgeons from Germany and the Ukraine, and internationally well-known basic and clinical scientists were invited to contribute and present their latest results. The Falk Symposium 169 took place in the historic city of Kiev, Ukraine. The presented work addressed each of the major areas of current IBD research. The symposium covered all the significant advances in this field. This publication contains the papers submitted by the participating scientists and, as such, presents an excellent review of what is known about IBD and its clinical management.

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for the organizers of the Falk Symposium 169