Actinic Keratosis
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The hardest thing to see is what is in front of your eyes.
Was ist das Schwerste von allem?
Was dir das Leichteste dünkt,
Mit den Augen zu sehen,
was vor den Augen dir liegt.
Johann Christoph Friedrich von Schiller (1759–1805), German Poet

This quote from Schiller, which is commonly attributed to Goethe, fits well with the dermatologic condition called actinic keratosis. In some aspects, actinic keratosis is the most common and most well-known pathology in dermatology. Actinic keratoses are found in significant numbers on the sun-exposed skin of Caucasians, especially those lucky enough to be living in sun-bathed countries such as Australia, as two of the editors and a considerable number of authors do.

One may question why it is necessary to dedicate a book to this quite ordinary pathology. Everything about this condition seems crystal clear: the cause of its appearance, its pathogenesis, its clinical and pathologic features, its treatment, and also its prognosis. It is exactly because of this clarity that it is necessary to dedicate a book to actinic keratosis. This ordinary pathology provides insight into an extraordinary number of important biological and clinical processes.

All of these thoughts came into my mind when asked by Gregor Jemec to consider compiling a book on actinic keratosis. However, reflection on my discussions with Tarl Prow and Gregor Jemec made it soon evident to all of us that actinic keratosis is actually one of the best examples in mankind for studying the potential evolution from benign erythaematous lesions, with some flaky scales, to more or less tender nodules that rarely, but still too often, lead to metastasis and death. Additionally, it is probably fair to say that actinic keratoses are a remarkable experiment of nature that allows us to study biologic questions in regards to carcinogenesis and its treatment in our patients in an unprecedented manner. There is quite a bit of controversial literature on the interpretation of actinic keratosis as a benign lesion, a precursor lesion, or a ‘carcinoma en miniature,’ highlighting the different schools of thought and underlying divergent interpretations between researchers and clinicians. The attentive reader will realise that this intellectual diversity is also reflected by our chapters’ authors, who represent world-renowned experts in the field of actinic keratosis.

We tried to encompass all the facets of this condition by inviting researchers and clinicians across the spectrum, from epidemiology to immunology and from molecular biology to behavioural psychology, and of course, pathologists and clinicians working at the coal face with patients who bear the many clinical facets of actinic keratoses. In this spirit, this book on actinic keratosis will be of interest for scientists and clinicians alike with a special interest in this common and
fascinating condition that affects our patients beyond cosmetics; often has an impact on morbidity; and rarely, when progressing uncontrolled, also has an impact on mortality.

In conclusion, we are greatly indebted to all the authors contributing to the different chapters, and we wish to thank them all for a great collaborative effort. Finally, a special thank you goes to Sandra Braun from KARGER who accompanied us through the various stages of the process of getting this book to completion.

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