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The Obese Child

Volume Editors
P.L. Giorgi, Ancona
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Preface

It is a well-known fact that there has been a significant increase in the prevalence of obesity during infancy, childhood and adolescence. At the present time, 15-25% of children and adolescents in the United States are obese. In other developed countries the data on obesity are just as impressive. Although obesity can be diagnosed clinically, it is defined as the state where the ratio of actual weight to ideal weight for height is greater than 120% for age and sex. Endocrine or genetic syndromes account for less than 1% of childhood obesity with the remaining 99% having simple obesity.

Over the past several years, the study of obesity has been intensified and expanded. We are now using a multidisciplinary approach encompassing such areas as genetics, morphology, biochemistry, radiology, and psychology. Needless to say, we are only just beginning to understand the complexities of obesity. The need for reviewing the state of the art of childhood obesity was the motivation for organizing an International Symposium which was held in Ancona, Italy, September 20-22, 1990. This volume, which contains the invited papers from the meeting, intends to highlight some of the paths along which recent progress has been made and to delineate objectives towards which future investigations might be aimed. Several articles contain elements of both review and essay and can be considered as an introduction to current thinking. We have collected important contributions from various disciplines which have to be considered if we wish to obtain an adequate overall understanding of childhood obesity. The volume begins with a broad overview of the genetic and environmental basis of obesity and continues with the presentation of recent morphological and biochemical work and with an insight into adipose tissue and its role in obesity. A number of articles explore the metabolism of lipids, proteins and carbohydrates in the obese.
child and the latest advances in our understanding of body composition, energy balance and thermogenesis. The contribution of hormones, receptors and the nervous system in the development of obesity is reviewed. A number of authors also emphasize the importance of the psychosocial factors effecting childhood obesity. There are reviews of the treatment of obesity. Some suggest PSMF (protein sparing modified fast) whereas others recommend a balanced diet only.

The problem of those who do not respond to the therapeutic intervention is more complex. Treatment of obesity cannot be viewed only in terms of diet. The patient and his family have to acquire an awareness of the importance of a change in lifestyle. Obviously, the role of the family in the educational and behavioral management of childhood obesity is very significant. Taken together, the findings presented in this volume can be used as a guide for pediatricians interested in the treatment of the obese child. We should not view obesity as a simple excess of body mass but should always search for hidden causes of the excess weight. This may help in preparing the ground for causal therapy. We believe that this phenotypical expression of a multifactorial etiology deserves continued attention. We hope that this volume will stimulate researchers and clinicians alike to pursue the several unanswered questions in childhood obesity.

One of the first steps in this way has been done during the meeting in Ancona by promoting the constitution of a European Childhood Obesity Group.

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