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Introduction

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Osteoporosis is one of the most clinically relevant disabling chronic disease encountered in clinical practice. Glucocorticoid excess is a common cause of osteoporosis and fractures. Glucocorticoids have complex mechanisms of action, which have not been elucidated completely. Glucocorticoids may increase bone resorption, inhibit bone formation and have indirect actions on bone by decreasing intestinal calcium absorption, and inducing hypercalciuria. In addition, glucocorticoids inhibit the gonadotropic and somatotropic axes. Currently, numerous scientists are dedicated to the study of this pathologic condition. Both endogenous and exogenous glucocorticoid excess are important causes of osteoporosis. Glucocorticoids are commonly prescribed for the treatment of a number of disease conditions, notably rheumatic, pulmonary and allergic disorders. The objective of this book is to bring the view of experts in the field of glucocorticoids and of bone metabolism to the attention of physicians who prescribe glucocorticoids in their practice and may encounter osteoporosis as a complication. We hope to increase the awareness of physicians using glucocorticoids. The panel of experts who contributed to this book, with their different background and research interests, reflects the need of a multidisciplinary approach to the management of glucocorticoid-induced osteoporosis. Basic scientists offer their views of the molecular, cellular and hormonal mechanisms by which glucocorticoid-mediated bone loss takes place. Clinical scientists delineate state-of-the art perspectives in the diagnosis, prevention and treatment of glucocorticoid-induced osteoporosis. Particular attention is paid to the use of bisphosphonates in the prevention and treatment of this serious condition. The ultimate goal of this publication is the creation of the appropriate scientific environment for the development of necessary guidelines for the management of glucocorticoid-induced osteoporosis. Finally, we would like to thank the contributors of the book who, with their generous support have allowed us to prepare a state-of-the art publication, which in part reflects findings reported during the First International Congress on Glucocorticoid-induced Osteoporosis held in Gardone Riviera (Italy) in April 1999.