Foreword

It has been known for a long time that chronic diseases during childhood and adolescence may have a profound impact on growth and development. Modern treatment, such as glucocorticoid and antimitotic therapy, has improved the prognosis for children, particularly with chronic inflammatory and malignant illnesses. However, these forms of therapy have severe side effects of their own, which by a range of mechanisms may also contribute to disturbance of physical development and limitation of final adult height.

The aims of the Workshop held in Cambridge in December 2001 were firstly to describe the growth and pubertal development of patients with a range of chronic illnesses. Secondly, the meeting aimed to discuss the mechanisms responsible at a cellular level for these disturbances, due both to the primary illnesses and their treatment. Finally, future strategies to study these pathogenetic mechanisms and improve the treatment and long-term prognosis for growth and development in these patients were debated.

One of the most important developments in paediatric endocrinology is the growing interaction with other paediatric sub-specialities, particularly concerning abnormalities of growth and development. Such interaction is long overdue, has arguably been neglected in the past, and was strongly encouraged by the participants of this Workshop.

This Supplement reports the proceedings of the Workshop, which to our knowledge is the first scientific meeting specifically aimed to address the field of abnormal growth and metabolism in chronic paediatric disorders. A wide range of disorders were covered varying from gastrointestinal inflammation and malabsorption, cystic fibrosis, juvenile chronic arthritis, adrenal hyperfunction, diabetes mellitus, to thalassaemia and malignancy.

We are very grateful to the many specialists who have brought their contribution to this important field of paediatrics and who describe their experience in this Supplement. We hope the readers will find the articles of interest for the understanding and prevention of some of the most important manifestations of chronic disease, namely abnormal growth, abnormal puberty and abnormality of adult height. We are grateful to Serono laboratories for sponsoring the meeting.

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