HEPATOLOGY

A Textbook of Liver Disease

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PREFACE

The sick patient confronts the physician with two interrelated problems. The physician must discover the organ system causing the illness and then the specific cause for the dysfunction of that organ. Solutions to both of these problems depend on a fundamental knowledge of the pathophysiology of disease, which provides the intellectual framework for thinking logically about clinical problems. The value of a pathophysiologic perspective on illness is not limited, however, to the context of the immediate care of patients. Many of today's concepts relating to the causes and therapies of liver disease will be proved invalid by future research. We expect, however, that the established principles of hepatic physiology and biochemistry will remain constant. These principles, therefore, form the basis for interpreting concepts about disease and for evaluating the validity of research. Moreover, the biochemical and physiologic principles of organ function are the points of departure for advances in our ability to alter the natural course of illness. Thus, we believe that the value of a pathophysiologic approach to disease cannot be overestimated. We have been guided by this idea in organizing the material for this book, in selecting the topics to be discussed, and in choosing the contributors.

The material in the first section of the book is intended to provide the basis for understanding the relationships between hepatic morphology and function and the categories of function that are unique to the liver and have a critical impact on the viability of other organs. The manner in which hepatic disease manifests itself is the overall topic of Section II. Section III deals with methods for evaluating hepatic function *per se*. Etiologic agents in the production of liver disease are discussed in Section IV. The chapters in this portion of the book are organized on the basis of specific disease entities. The approach in all sections is to discuss problems from a pathophysiologic viewpoint. Where possible, this discussion touches on biochemical and molecular mechanisms. Also, we have asked the authors to illuminate not only what is known but in addition, what is unknown and to avoid unrealistic simplifications of complex and controversial issues. When dealing with such issues, we have attempted instead to indicate the level at which there is agreement on basic points.

Since we do not believe it is possible to prepare a definitive text on liver disease, our goal has been to furnish the reader with an up-to-date interim report of progress in this area. In this regard, we believe that this text will serve as a useful source of information for the practicing physician who wants to read in depth about a specific disease or who needs an answer to an immediate clinical problem. It also will be useful for undergraduate medical students who read it primarily for the purpose of acquiring a basic understanding of the presentations and natural histories of diseases and their treatments. Most importantly, we hope that the contents of this book prove to be a stimulus for creative thinking about the unsolved problems of liver dysfunction.

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