Editors' foreword

This symposium, the seventh in the series 'Chemical pathology in relation to clinical medicine,' was organized by the Committee on Chemical Pathology of the Association of Clinical Pathologists. We are very much indebted to the chairman, Professor J. R. Hobbs, for his advice on the programme and for his success in bringing together such an expert team of speakers.

The topic 'Disorders of protein metabolism' is a very wide one, and it has been necessary to focus on those aspects considered to be of special importance at present and in the near future, and in particular on the estimation of specific plasma proteins and their clinical significance. It is clear that the average chemical pathologist will in future make much more use of immunological methods for protein assay, as for instance in the estimation of albumin, of immunoglobulins, of acute phase reactants and of the so-called tumour-specific antigens. Moreover, until more departments of immunology are set up, he may find himself, with his haematological colleagues, attempting to unravel the complexities of disorders of cellular and humoral immune response.

It should be noted that immunological techniques have certain limitations. In view of the prognostic value of serial estimation of plasma paraprotein levels, the warnings of several speakers should be heeded that such proteins can only be measured reliably at present by electrophoresis and dye-binding. Furthermore Dr Ritchie has demonstrated the unreliability of some commercial immunoassay plates for estimating immunoglobulins.

On behalf of the Association of Clinical Pathologists we thank all the speakers for their notable contributions, Professor Hobbs for chairing the symposium so effectively and Dr T. Hargreaves who, as secretary of the Committee on Chemical Pathology, was responsible for the detailed organization. We also thank the Royal Society of Medicine for permission to hold the symposium on their premises.

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