Editors' foreword

Unlike many of its predecessors the ninth symposium of the ACP series 'Chemical pathology in relation to clinical medicine', organised by the Committee on Chemical Pathology under its Chairman Dr Colin Hobbs, was devoted to advances which have not yet found wide application in clinical practice.

Although the specialty of endocrinology was born out of studies by Bayliss and Starling at the beginning of this century on the regulation of pancreatic secretion, the gut did not share in the rapid advances that followed, partly because of great difficulties in extracting the active peptide hormones from the widely scattered endocrine cells. In more recent years many of these technical difficulties have been overcome and the spectacular developments in methods of protein purification, together with the great sensitivity of radioimmunoassay, have enabled considerable advances to be made. Not only has much been learned about gastrointestinal physiology, but many of the peptide hormones isolated from the gut have now also been located in the brain, thus opening a new chapter in our understanding of cerebral function.

The aetiology of many diseases of the alimentary tract is still obscure but much work has been done to elucidate the possible role of gut hormones. Although many abnormalities have been reported, so far only in the diagnosis of certain tumours have measurements of serum levels of these hormones become an essential part of the investigation. However, knowledge is still increasing at a rapid rate and this will change. The Symposium provides an opportunity for the non-specialist to catch up and evaluate progress in this rapidly expanding field.

The Association of Clinical Pathologists is grateful to the speakers who took part, to Dr C. B. Hobbs and his Committee for the organisation, and to the Royal Society of Medicine for the use of its premises.

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